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The
Hôtel d'Angleterre

LANOE FALCONER
AUTHOR OF 'MADAME IXE'



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[Mary Elizabeth - Cooke

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THE HÔTEL
D'ANGLETERRE
AND
OTHER STORIES

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LANOE FALCONER

THE HÔTEL
D'ANGLETERRE
AND
OTHER STORIES

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"MADEMOISELLE IRE"

FOURTH EDITION

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THE HÔTEL D'ANGLETERRE.

THE Hôtel d'Angleterre is well named, for though it stands on the shores of the Mediterranean, with olive-groves and orange-gardens all around it, nevertheless it is as truly British territory as a London street or a Devonshire village. The visitors are all English, or foreigners with English tastes, all of good social standing, all orthodox in politics as well as in religion; but in spite, or perhaps even in consequence, of all this, the hotel is apt to be a trifle dull. Such was not the case, however, during

that memorable winter when it was enlivened by the bright presence of Miss Belinda Grant, before whom dulness vanished as shade before the sun. Hers was the sparkle of strong vitality. She was never tired or languid, or bored or indifferent; but always up to the mark, if not beyond it; and as she was ever ready to employ this overflowing energy in amusing and even directing her fellows, she was generally esteemed and beloved, especially by that large and supine number who like to have everything—even their thinking—done for them.

Kohl, the proprietor, heartily approved of a guest who, with the charades, dances, picnics, and entertainments of every kind which she organized, kept all the other visitors alert and amused; while her brilliancy and her beauty were the admiration of the whole German-Swiss staff, with two exceptions—the concierge, a little man with

keenly observant eyes, which from his post in the hall he had good opportunities of using, and Suzanne, the chambermaid on Belinda's own *étage*, the third. The concierge said nothing whilst the others sung the praises of this lovely "Mees"; and Suzanne irreverently spoke of her as a "*grande gaillarde*," and of the pleasant stir she made wherever she went as a *vacarme*; but then Suzanne was of a moody and even cynical disposition.

One day Belinda and her family were late for the meal which was called either "lunch" or *déjeuner*, and served at half-past twelve. The gong had long finished its discordant summons, from the various *étages* the visitors had come trooping down; all the places, save three, were taken, and the fresh-faced waiters were handing round the first *plat*, when the Grants entered. First came Mrs. Grant's slender and drooping

her health, and her son comes with her to keep her company. He must put up with a west room; at this time of year it—
What is this? A telegram?"

It was; and from England. Mrs. Grant, to whom it was addressed, opened it with evident trepidation, and then, with a perplexed look, handed it to Belinda. The message, which she did not read aloud, was from Lady Montford, and ran thus: "Are drains and water safe?"

After lunch, in her mother's room, where they generally sat, and which Belinda had decorated with pictures and knick-knacks, she composed an answer as satisfactory as it was terse: "Perfect."

"I suppose they are," said Mrs. Grant, a little doubtfully, when it was read to her.

"Of course; why should they not be?" said Belinda.

Next day a more puzzling question arrived: "Is climate relaxing or bracing?"

• "Which does she prefer?" asked Belinda, and was a little displeased because her mother could not tell her.

However, with great tact she telegraphed back: "Invigorating."

One more telegram to say she had changed her mind and would not come, and then another to say she had changed it again and would, completed this prelude to Lady Montford's arrival.

"I suppose there is some kind of a dower-house where she could live when he married," said Belinda thoughtfully, the day the Montford's were expected. She sat with her mother, drinking afternoon tea, as all the English loyally did at Oliviera, squeezing it in with some difficulty between the midday *déjeuner* and a six o'clock dinner.

Mrs. Grant did not know.

"I wish, mamma, you occasionally knew something I asked you."

"You see, dear, I was only at

Brookdean once, thirty years ago, when you and Sir Walter were both babies."

"I don't think there is the least occasion to remember anything about that."

"No, dear, certainly; of course; I beg your pardon; what I meant to say was that we were there such a very short time. I was sorry, for it is a beautiful place, such a picturesque house, and such fine views; but your dear papa and Lady Montford did not get on well. He did not approve of people giving way to illness, never having had a day's illness himself. He could not bear my not coming down to breakfast even when I was seriously unwell; so of course he was rather shocked at Lady Montford's way of constantly going to bed—I mean for quite little things, like being tired or sneezing."

"I should think so. And pray, what did her own husband say to it?"

"Oh! he said nothing but the

kindest and most sympathetic things. Oh! what a good husband he was! I never met such an unselfish, kindhearted man! They say the son is just like him, and quite as patient with his mother."

"That is all very well, but I hope he is not so patient as to wish to have her in the house after he married, because I—I mean nobody would be able to put up with that. By the by where is Joan all this time; what has happened to her?"

One of those small things, one remembers all one's life long had happened to Joan. She was sitting in the big window of the deserted *salon*, thoroughly enjoying the solitude and the silence, and dividing her attention between the book on her knee and the view outside. They were both poems. Beyond the green and gold of the orange-trees on the terrace, beyond the red roofs of the town below, she saw a band of liquid blue, vivid as the

petal of a forget-me-not, dark as a midsummer night; above which floated a chain of mountains, or rather the ghosts of mountains, shaped out of softest violet-coloured vapour. It was like a mosaic of jewelled stones on such a radiant afternoon as this was.

"Ah! yes," thought Joan, shifting a little the heavy volume of Shakespeare on her lap, "the world is quite as beautiful as the poets say, but life is very different. There is nothing poetical or romantic about that; and as to falling in love like the girls always do in plays and stories, it is impossible. The real men are all so commonplace-looking."

Hardly had she formed this conclusion when, looking up, she saw, through the window, standing between the primulas on the door-steps, a tall, fair young man as handsome and even romantic-looking as Ferdinand himself might have been. And yet he

wore a tweed suit, and a wide-awake hat, and carried a bundle of railway wraps. Joan, transfixed with surprise, continued to stare at him, mechanically repeating to herself, with quite a new perception of them, the words she had just been reading:—

“I might call thee a thing divine: for
nothing natural,
I ever saw so noble.”

Till suddenly he looked up at her. Then Joan fled, startled as if she had seen a ghost, so completely and in an instant had her theory of life been overturned.

It was Sir Walter Montford who had just stepped out of the long omnibus from the station. He was thinking of anything but poetry or romance, being responsible for the luggage, including all the rugs, baskets, and umbrellas which Lady Montford herself was too ill, and West, the maid, too bewildered to count; yet he saw and noticed

with a passing thrill of compassion the little face at the window so wan and so wistful-eyed.

In the hall which bright colours and gilding and flowers made so gay, the dapper Herr Kohl himself received the new-comers, and forthwith conducted them to what he called "the leeft." He observed politely, as they started, that Madame and Mademoiselle Grant waited on the third *étage* to welcome them.


"How very inconsiderate!" cried Lady Montford. "Just when it is so important, after all this fatigue, that I should not be over-excited. If I am not extremely careful, I shall have a bad night, and that is a thing I cannot stand. West, I hope you have the tea-things ready, where you can get them at once; I have not taken anything for nearly three hours now, and I must not allow myself to get low or——"

But at this instant the lift stopped, the door opened, and in

the doorway appeared a tall and beautiful blonde, who, in ringing accents, bade them welcome to Oliviera. Mrs. Grant, too, was there, but she was very glad to leave Belinda to do the honours with her customary grace and animation. She introduced Lady Montford to her south room with a gracious speech, none the less fluently delivered, because the person to whom it was principally addressed was too busy superintending West's preparations, to pay even the semblance of attention.

"Well, mother," said Sir Walter, somewhat disturbed himself by this scene, "I will leave you, because I know you like to be alone after a long journey. You won't come down to *table d'hôte*; but we shall meet, I hope, Miss Grant."

They did meet on the staircase, as the gong was sounding, when behind Belinda, looking beautifully pink and white in her shimmering black gown, crept a



"What? Staying at home?"

"Yes—and being narrow-minded."

But before Belinda had decided what he could mean, everybody rose and they all left the dining-room.

In the big drawing-room Sir Walter was introduced to the Grants' especial friends. They were all very gracious to him except Admiral Hunt, who was never gracious to anybody, and Mr. Smith, who viewed him with pardonable dislike in a field where he had been hitherto without a rival. The ladies praised Oliviera to him, and still more ardently lauded "dear Miss Grant."

"She keeps my girls perpetually amused," said Mrs. Cowell, knitting placidly the while in a deep arm-chair. "Ah! she is getting up a round game. Will you join it?"

Sir Walter, looking carefully round the room and observing that the little pale girl had

vanished, said he must go and see how his mother was getting on.

She was not getting on at all. The sheets were insufficiently aired, there was a dangerous draught from the window with a strange earthy smell in the passage, and last but not least her hot milk had not been cooked to the exact temperature which she desired.

"I will see the cook to-morrow, mother, and tip him."

"And there is another thing, Walter, about which we must come to an understanding. I cannot have that woman running in and out of my room all day."

"What woman, mother?"

"That Miss Grant; the big one with the high colour. The little one I do not mind, and the mother was always an inoffensive person; but if I were to see much of the eldest she would drive me into a fever. Her voice—you know how sensitive I am to voices—her voice goes through

me like a knife; and she presumes to tell me what I had better do and what I had better not do—I, who have made a study of my health for years.”

“Ah! Well, the cook I can tackle; but I really cannot undertake to suggest to Miss Grant that any one can have too much of her company.”



“Very well, then, I must manage it myself. I must just give her a hint. ‘Miss Grant,’ I will say, ‘do not trouble to inquire after my health so often, for in the present state of my nerves the less I see of all but very intimate friends the better.’”

“Hum! That will certainly be explicit. I am afraid you don’t appreciate Miss Belinda Grant. She is the idol of the hotel. They all worship her.”

“You don’t mean to tell me, Walter, that you admire her!”

“How could I help admiring her.”

That was, indeed, the prevailing impression at the Hôtel



d'Angleterre. Everybody, high and low, prepared to watch the development of a love-affair. The servants were divided in opinion as to whether the hero and heroine were already betrothed or no. The concierge affirmed that they were not and never would be, and Suzanne was understood to hope the same out of pity, as she declared, for an unfortunate young man already sufficiently afflicted by a mother like No. 87, who ate like an ogre and demanded every hour impossible things.

Meantime Belinda, with even more than her usual zeal, was providing for Sir Walter's entertainment, and a series of picnics filled up the first two or three days of his visit, and, if the ungracious truth must be confessed, considerably bored him.

One morning, strolling out from the *salle-à-manger* where he had been eating a substantial English breakfast, he saw Joan standing at the table where all

day long the concierge distributed stamps, change and advice to the visitors.

"You are better to-day," he said, as he shook hands with her.

Her face was less colourless than usual, her eyes, a little wider open, proved to be blue instead of grey, and her lips as she answered him curved into a smile.

"Oh yes, I am quite well. Another stamp, please; for Italy this time. Mamma and I are going to have a nice long afternoon together."

"Indeed! Where?"

"Only here. You know Belinda and all of you are going to Terraville to see the pottery."

"Are we?"

"Yes. Don't you remember? Belinda arranged it last night. Mamma does not go for long drives, and there is no room for me."

"And you are in good spirits at getting rid of us all?"



Joan looked a little confused. "No, not all," she said; then, as if she felt she were getting into a difficulty, she muttered something about Belinda waiting, and ran off. By the time she had reached the next *étage* her embarrassment was forgotten, for Sir Walter, standing where she had left him, could hear her humming a little song. When he could hear it no longer he turned away with a slight start, like one who has been dreaming, and then observed the concierge's eyes fixed upon him.

When the gong sounded for *déjeuner* that day, the rain was falling heavily. The concierge met Belinda at the foot of the stairs :

"You weel not require the *fiacres* this afternoon, I suppose, Mees."

"Certainly, I shall."

"Pardon, Mees; I thought perhaps the weather—and Mrs. Cowell she said you would not go."

"We are going; send for the *fiacres* again if you have countermanded them."


"Mrs. Cowell," she cried, directly she took her place opposite that lady, "do I hear you want to give up the expedition to Terraville?"

"Well, my dear, I thought perhaps as it was so wet, you——"

"But what does it matter whether it is wet or dry? The carriages can be shut. I hate stopping indoors all day, and when I make a plan I like to carry it out, don't you, Sir Walter?"

"Certainly," said Sir Walter, without the faintest notion what she was asking him, having acquired in his mother's company a convenient but dangerous habit of totally ignoring uninteresting talk. Besides, he was wondering where and how Joan intended to spend the afternoon.

Belinda prevailed, as she always did, and at half-past two she marshalled her party in



the hall, and directed them to their places in the *fiacres* which stood in a row before the door-steps in the pouring rain. In the last she was to go herself, with two of the younger Cowell girls and Sir Walter. The girls had already run giggling down the steps, and were waiting for her to follow. But where was he? Coming downstairs very slowly, without either hat or coat on!

Not only Belinda's eyes, but those of all the attendant waiters rested on him with amazement; but Sir Walter was blissfully unconscious of the emotions he excited.

"Sir Walter!" exclaimed Belinda. "You are not ready?"

"I?" he answered, rather absently. "Oh, no; I am not going."

Then, strolling up to the doorway, through which the rain and the wind were beating, he added, in the same tone, "I hope you won't get wet."

Belinda, without answering,

ran quickly down towards the *fiacre*, and as it drove slowly off he turned away towards the drawing-room.

"What did I tell you?" said the concierge, brushing the rain-drops from his shoulders.

"It is certainly wonderful," said the head waiter. "But the English no man can understand."

In the great fireplace in the drawing-room they had lighted a wood fire, which flickered cheerfully. Sir Walter, looking in, saw Mrs. Grant in a deep arm-chair beside the hearth, the lines of her head and figure suggesting complete and thoroughly-enjoyed repose; but she was alone. He went back to the hall and wandered up and down, till his watching ear heard a step upon the stairs. He could gaze at Joan intently as she came down the last flight, for her eyes anxiously rested on a pyramid of books and boxes which she carried with some difficulty. At the

foot of the stairs he came forward to help her.

"Allow me——" he said.

But Joan gave a little cry, and the upper part of her pyramid fell in a shower around her.

"Why, I thought you had gone to Terraville!" she said.

The least touchy mortals are sometimes ruffled by very little.

"Allow me to carry these things into the *salon* for you," said Sir Walter, stooping to collect them, "and then I will keep out of your way as completely as if I had gone to Terraville."

Joan gasped and grew crimson as she followed him into the *salon*, where he silently deposited his burden.

"Why, Sir Walter," exclaimed Mrs. Grant, at sight of him, in tones of amazement mingled with dismay, "you have not gone to Terraville, then?"

"No, I have not. I dislike expeditions of all kinds, and I think the Terraville pottery

hideous ; still, I am very sorry to have caused so much disappointment. I don't quite understand how my going should have been taken for granted. I am certain I never said I was going."

He left the room, and was turning towards the stairs, when Joan came quickly after him.

"Please forgive me," she said, pantingly, breathless with nervousness. "I did not mean anything rude : you quite misunderstood me."

The effort tinged her whole face with a delicate pink, which in some curious way threw into relief the fine lines of her brows and contour and the violet darkness of her beseeching eyes.

"You see it is Belinda," said Joan, gathering courage a little, as his face softened. "Belinda always understood you were going ; and when people do not do as she expects, she does not like it."

"Oh !"

"And then—of course—when

Belinda does not like things, she is—I mean—it is not pleasant for mamma, don't you see?"

"Well, no, I must confess I don't see exactly; but it does not matter. Nothing matters," he added, with one of those moving changes of tone of which some voices, like fine instruments, are capable, "so long as I may understand the sight of me is not hateful to you."


Whereupon the walls of the hall seemed to Joan to grow misty and recede.

After that the afternoon went very happily, though Mrs. Grant was visibly dejected. Joan's shyness, for the time at least, had disappeared in the excitement of her great effort, and Sir Walter made the most of the opportunity. When at last he succeeded in making her laugh, his heart bounded within him; but his triumph was still greater when, as the afternoon wore on, and Mrs. Grant fell into a doze, Joan began to speak about herself.

The photographs she was now unfolding and gumming into her album were views of dear, dear Dellhurst, their English home. It was a small and humble home enough, to judge by its portraits, nor did the surrounding country appear transcendently beautiful.

"But the air is lovely," said Joan. "Mamma and I always feel so well there. Of course Oliviera is a great deal prettier; but I am not artistic like Belinda, and I cannot admire things properly when I always feel tired or have neuralgia, as I do here. Belinda does not care for Dellhurst, and she does not like to see me with those photos. Some day, when she marries, mamma and I will go back to Dellhurst. We will make the garden so pretty, and I mean to keep some hens."

As Joan unfolded this magnificent programme, she looked straight before her with dilated eyes, as if she saw across Europe



and the sea her chickens and her roses.

"And will you invite me to——"

But his words were interrupted by the sound of wheels on the gravel outside, and three *fiacres* drove noisily up to the hall-door.


Mrs. Grant awoke with a kind of guilty start and stood up; Joan also sprang to her feet and began hastily collecting her treasures. Belinda's voice and step were heard in the hall, and then she entered.

"What, here still! I thought you would have tea ready by this time. Mamma, you know I think this *salon* is too draughty for you. Dear me! what a litter! Pray take it upstairs at once."

"I hope you have had a pleasant afternoon," said Sir Walter.

But Belinda swept from the room without a word.

"If Belinda's wrath takes the form of silence," thought he, "I think I can bear it."



Nor was he much dismayed when, coming down late to dinner, he found the order of their places changed, and a chair left vacant for him at some distance from the Grants. Without a pang of regret he heard Belinda chattering most pleasantly to Mr. Smith. All he now wanted was to carry on his interrupted conversation with Joan, and that he intended to do directly after dinner. When it was over he went with all the others to the hall, where the concierge every night distributed the letters which the English mail had brought. There was one for Belinda, and as she opened it he drew near to Joan; but Belinda, without waiting to read her letter, took her sister off to the *salon*, and set her to play in a round game which lasted till bedtime.

And so it went on. Mrs. Grant and Joan were never to be seen save in company with Belinda; and her look, and the tone of her

voice when she answered curtly such remarks as he ventured to make to her, seemed to draw around all three an invisible but impassable barrier. Joan, it would seem, could not even look across it for lack either of courage or desire, and her eyes, heavy and wistful as when he first saw her, were kept steadily averted from him.

After three days he began to understand the full disadvantage of displeasing Belinda.

At this serious and unexpected hitch there was dismay among all the interested spectators, not excepting the little concierge, to whose private and particular theory it was as fatal as to any one's. The only person who remained wholly unmoved by it was Lady Montford—too absorbed in discovering whether the air of Oliviera really suited her or no to have time to take heed of passing events.

One day some friends—Mr. and Mrs. Loscombe—came over from Nice to lunch with Belinda,

bringing with them, uninvited, a third guest. At first sight of him Belinda was inclined to be displeased, for he was not only old and ugly, but he was common looking, and Belinda could not bear anything common.

"Dearest Belinda," cried Mrs. Loscombe, "we have taken the greatest liberty; but you are always so kind and sweet, I know you will forgive us for venturing to bring with us a very intimate friend, who is staying with us—Lord Denby."

Upon which Belinda visibly softened.

"He is such a dear," Mrs. Loscombe whispered to Belinda, as they went in arm-and-arm to *déjeuner*. "A widower with no children; very rich; but so shy; we can hardly get him to open his lips."

"Oh, I can always get on with people like that," said Belinda, and forthwith made good her words; and the day after, in answer to a pressing invitation

from the Loscombes, she went off to pay them a visit.

The news was broken that same afternoon to Sir Walter by Miss Tucker, who was sitting disconsolate in the *salon* with a railway guide before her.

"Gone, just when I wanted her so much to decide for me which route I had better go home by. Is it not miserable without her?"

Lady Montford also made mention of Belinda's departure, but in somewhat different terms.

"Ah, what a treat it is! No, she never came into my room, but none of those flimsy foreign walls could keep out the sound of her voice: it was going all day long in the next room or in the passage. I shall dine downstairs to-day."

"We seem lost without Miss Grant, don't we?" said Mrs. Cowell, at dinner.

Sir Walter did, indeed, look as if he were lost—in thought. A small stringed band, which from

time to time visited the hotel, was going to play that night, and under cover of the music and in Belinda's absence, he hoped to come to some explanation with Joan.

He came out of the reading-room, just as the musicians were softly testing their strings before beginning. They stood in front of the great centre-piece of statues and ferns, where clusters of lamps glowed above the green; while all around and in the windows and on the stairs, the visitors had grouped themselves to listen. The scene was bright and picturesque and foreign, but Sir Walter surveyed it all in search of one thing, and found it not.

He leant against the wall just beside the concierge's table, and waited and watched while the band played their first piece—a brilliant overture.

"Mrs. Grant is not here?" he said, inquiringly, to Mrs. Cowell, as the patter of applause died away.

"No; she has a headache. She has gone to bed, I think."

"Mees Grant," observed the concierge, in a low voice, and with a tact which Sir Walter did not at the time sufficiently observe or admire—"she hears the music from upstairs, on the third *étage*."

The band was playing again: this time quick dance music, to which Sir Walter felt as if his pulses kept time, however deliberately his feet may have moved as he went upstairs. On the first and the second landings waiters, maids, and couriers hung over the bannisters listening to the music, but on the third floor there was nobody but Joan, sitting all by herself on the last step. The gay measure had now changed to a slower and a sweeter one, and Joan heard it in something the same spirit in which ten days ago she had looked upon the flower-like blue of the sea. But since then her faith in the possibilities of life


had widened: she found it easy to believe that fate might match the beauty of the loveliest place and season with rapture as supreme. Not for her, however, not for her was such bliss, but for the strong and beautiful elect of destiny, like——

Then she saw him coming up towards her. He looked royally beautiful, of course, but a little terrible all the same. His manner, as he returned her timid "Good evening," was cold, almost stern.

"Miss Grant," he said, forthwith standing erect and stiff on the step just below her, "have I offended you in any way?"

"Offended? I?" murmured Joan. As if the moth should presume to take umbrage at the star!

"Yes, so I naturally conclude from your manner. For three whole days you have avoided me in the most deliberate, the most marked way. You would not so much as look at me."



An unaccountable thrill of pleasure tempered the distress with which she heard these reproaches.

"I was not—how could I be?—offended. It was Belinda who was angry."

"But had I given Miss Grant any reason to be offended?"

"No, of course not."

"Then why, because she was offended without a cause, should you have been—so cruel?"

There was a sudden change of key towards the close of this sentence, so irresistible was the upward look of the meek and beseeching little face. But he was far from guessing how moved Joan really was under that tremulous but quiet bearing by a scene which to him was in part a joke: to her all grim earnest. She answered, with little pauses to draw breath between every two or three words:

"Mamma wished me not to speak to you, if I could possibly help it."

"What! Have I offended Mrs. Grant?"

"Oh, no, not in the least; and mamma likes you very much."

"Indeed! And yet she forbids you to speak to me?"

"Only because if I had spoken to you it would have made Belinda angry."

The music below had ceased. There was complete silence as Sir Walter heard and considered this remarkable explanation. The domestic situation it suggested was to him simply ludicrous, and he knew not with which of the three actors therein to be most impatient. His feelings found relief in irony.

"Ah! If Miss Grant would be angry, that is a different thing. Of course anything is better than that. I am sorry I ventured to approach you, and I shall be careful not to do so again. Do you think she would object to my wishing you good-bye?"


He did not stir, having not the faintest intention of going. But

how could Joan know this? She looked not up, but down now, so that he could not see her face.

"Perhaps she might even allow us to shake hands, since it is an eternal farewell," he went on, and three exquisite opening chords from below punctuated the terrible words. "I don't think she would be very angry," he added, caressingly, as he sat down on the step beside Joan, the better to perform the ceremony.

Then he started violently; the child was crying fast.

Ah! well, after that, to use his own words in speaking of it afterwards, he was "a gone coon." What he exactly intended to do when he came upstairs has never been made plain; what he actually did was to lay himself and all that he possessed at the feet of the little girl he had been taking to task. He caught her in his arms and upbraided himself for having made her weep; he kissed away the tears and be-



sought her to give him the right for evermore to comfort and protect her, while below the violins seemed to reiterate all he said with sobs of almost human passion. But as the music ended with a dying fall, and he, too, paused and waited for her answer, a hateful footstep rapidly approaching caused them to draw asunder just before Suzanne appeared behind them.

Suzanne, whom Sir Walter rose and faced with not the most welcoming expression, did not herself look in the best of humours.

"Madame desires to see you," she said, gruffly.

Joan rose, and they both went down the corridor together in silence. Even at Joan's door they could but exchange a cold "good night," since Suzanne was still close behind them.

"Pray are you waiting for anything?" said Sir Walter, impatiently.

"Eh, mon dieu! I am always

waiting for something. There is no means of doing otherwise with persons so capricious as those who come here. If Monsieur would kindly arrange with Madame at what hour in the end they do wish to start in the morning."


His mother's door was open, and the maid, laden with things, was running backwards and forwards between the room and the trunks outside.

'In the room itself Lady Montford paced up and down, surrounded by that disorder which attends a hasty packing up.

"Walter, where have you been?" she cried, at sight of him. "We must leave this place by the earliest possible train."

"Why, what is the matter?"

"From the first moment I stepped out of the train I knew there was something wrong. I said so to you that very night, did I not, West? But one person after another has told me such stories about the place, and so misled




me, that I hardly liked to believe my own senses. And now, by the merest chance—a most providential chance for me—I learn I was perfectly right. Imagine my feelings when I was told to-night that this air I am breathing, and have been breathing for a week now, has not a particle of ozone in it ! ”

“ Oh ! And who told you this ? ”

“ That very gentlemanly and intelligent-looking young man who sat next to me at the *table d'hôte* to-night. ”

“ Do you mean Mr. Smith ? ”

“ No, indeed. Mr. Smith is an idiot : he assured me the other day when I met him in the garden that the air was bracing. I mean that young dark man who arrived to-day. He told me a very clever doctor had assured him there was no ozone in the air of Oliviera until you got I forget how many thousands of feet above the level of the sea—far above this hotel in any case. ”



"Ah, well, perhaps for a short time it does not matter."

"Does not matter! My dear Walter, how wildly you talk! It is simply death to me to live in a place without ozone. Dr. Blind himself has often said to me, 'Whatever you have, or don't have, Lady Montford, you must have ozone.' And then sends me here!"

"Well, the only possible train to Paris leaves at midday to-morrow."

"I can't exist here till then. Let us go the other way, to Genoa, by the early train Mrs. Grant was talking of the other day."

"To Genoa! Are you sure there is any ozone there?"

"Oh yes; he said there was."

"Who? Dr. Blind?"

"No, indeed. No more of Dr. Blind for me after this. The young man I spoke of assured me the air there is excellent. We can go home by Turin and the Mont Cenis."


Sir Walter silently contemplated his mother. As flight was inevitable, Genoa was, he concluded, the best place to retreat to, since it possessed at least the signal merit of being but a day's journey from the Hôtel d'Angleterre. If only he might have seen Joan before he went !

He suggested that Suzanne should carry forthwith a message to Miss Grant which he was anxious she should have, but Suzanne protested that the young lady and her mother were by this time in bed and asleep, being rational persons, who at so late an hour remained tranquil, and allowed others to do the same. She consented, however, to convey betimes next day to Joan a note, in which Sir Walter explained what had happened, and entreated Joan to see him before he started for Genoa, or to let him know in some way that he was as happy as he hoped. The fee that accompanied this missive softened even Suzanne.

"I gave your note to the demoiselle without fault," she observed to him as he came out of his room next day in the early dawn. Its sad twilight, together with an unusual and depressing silence, rested over all the corridors as he went down with his mother to breakfast by candle-light. It was a cheerless repast. Lady Montford was afraid the tea had stood too long, and Sir Walter was not less troubled concerning a different matter. Why did Joan give no sign?

At last, the bundles and trunks having all been carried out, and the servants duly rewarded, there seemed no excuse for further delay, so they went forth into the clear, cold air of a rosy morning. But just as Sir Walter was about to follow his mother into the omnibus the concierge came tearing down the steps with a note in his hand for Monsieur.

"Another bill!" cried Lady Montford. "How provoking!"



Never mind ; we can send them the money from Genoa."

But it did not take two minutes to read.

"Please forgive me," wrote Joan, in a villainous hand, "for misleading you last night. It was all a mistake. I cannot be your wife."


"Go on!" cried Sir Walter, crushing the note up into his hand as he sprang into his place.

"*Au revoir Monsieur et Madame,*" cried the concierge.

"God forbid!" exclaimed Lady Montford. "It has nearly been the death of me—and of you too, my dear Walter. I never saw you look so ill as you do now."

Mrs. Grant, alone in her room that afternoon, was more than usually miserable. She had only been doing as she had done for years—sacrificing the child she loved to the child she feared ; but perhaps because that day the victim's sufferings were more evident, her torpid conscience

was uncomfortably roused. Joan was prostrate in her room with what she called a headache, and her mother suspected, with anguish, to be something worse. As she prepared afternoon tea, of which she intended to carry Joan a cup, the scene in her room the night before constantly recurred to her. She saw Joan as she first entered, radiant, transfigured, beautified even, by joy: then Joan, as she crept away again, all faded and drooping! Mrs. Grant writhed when she thought of it. And yet Joan had confessed, after a hesitation in itself preposterous, that she did not know whether she was in love with Sir Walter or not; adding, in her strange way, that he was too far above her for that. Perhaps this was the extravagant language of real passion, seeing that now the child seemed so heartbroken. "And yet, what could I do?—what could I do?" Mrs. Grant wailed, inwardly, repeating the great motto of her life: "Belinda



would have been so angry ; I never should have dared to tell her."

The door opened and Belinda entered. Mrs. Grant dropped the little china teapot on the stone hearth and broke it.

"Well really, mamma, you have, as the boys say, butter fingers!" said Belinda, but with less severe displeasure than clumsiness usually provoked from her.

"My dear, you startled me so. I thought you were at Nice. I had no idea you were coming home to-day."

"Nor I," said Belinda, taking her hat off before the glass and arranging her shining curls. "Never mind about the pieces, mamma; you have another teapot on the shelf there."

She was evidently in high good humour, and, as she always did when in this sunny mood, looked superbly handsome.

"The fact is," she began, taking her place in a low chair by

the wood fire, "that—— But where is Joan?"

"She is lying down. She has a headache—a very bad headache," added Mrs. Grant, for Belinda highly disapproved of people lying down in the daytime. Even in her present indulgent temper she looked displeased.

"What has she been doing? She was all right when I left. It is a strange thing that if I ever do go from home, Joan makes herself ill in some way. Have you been allowing her to stoop over books too much?"


"Oh no, dear, she has been reading very little for her."

"Then has she been over-walking herself?"

"No."

"Then why has she a headache?"

When Belinda asked questions in this tone Mrs. Grant had not the courage to keep silence, especially if there was anything she particularly wished to conceal from her daughter.



"Perhaps," she suggested, desperately, "the Montford's sudden going may have put her out."


"They have gone, have they? Mamma, surely that tea is ready to pour out? But why should the Montford's going suddenly or not make any difference to Joan?"

Mrs. Grant had by this time been driven, or to speak more correctly, had herself wildly rushed, into a corner from which a more self-possessed person might have found it difficult to escape. As it was she did not try, but, trembling, confessed what had happened.

"I assure you, Belinda," she concluded, "I never was so taken aback in all my life as when she told me he had proposed for her."

"I should think not. And what did you say?"

"Oh, I told her, of course," said Mrs. Grant, visibly cheering up at the thought that at last she had something agreeable to tell Belinda—"I told her, of course, that it could never be."



"What could never be?"

"Why, their marriage."

"Do you mean to tell me," said Belinda, slowly, putting down her cup and saucer and gazing as if dazed at her mother, "that you told her to refuse him?"

"Yes, of course."


"In Heaven's name, why?"

"Why, because I thought, Belinda," said Mrs. Grant, dissolving into tears, "I thought you would not like the marriage."

Then Belinda rose to her feet, her eyes blazing, her cheeks crimson, her breath shortened with indignation. In all her life Mrs. Grant had never seen her daughter so angry.

"What!" she cried in a voice that might have filled a theatre and with a gesture which would have electrified her audience. "What do you mean? What do you intend to insinuate? Really, mamma, you are enough to drive one crazy. Here is Joan, who, with her wretched looks and manners, could hardly be ex-

pected to have ever got an offer at all, is proposed to by a man with a title and a very nice place, and you actually tell her to refuse him, and then dare to put the blame on me. I would not like the marriage indeed! Pray why not? As if I ever wished to stand in Joan's way. Just as if instead of looking after her health and her interests and everything else in a way you never do, I was cruel to her, or perhaps even jealous of her. A nice idea you must give people of me. I have no doubt you told Joan I would not like it, and she, of course, will go complaining and repeating all about it to everybody. Well, one thing, thank goodness, they cannot say: they cannot say I am envious of her good luck, because I am going to make a much better marriage myself. Yes, I was going to tell you, if you had not flown at me in this way, that I was engaged to Lord Denby—engaged only this morning, and



that is another thing. Pray, what is to become of Joan? Lord Denby, being a very generous man, might not object to having you to live with him, but I cannot expect him to adopt my whole family."

This was by no means all that Belinda said, but it contains the sum and substance of her discourse. The rest consisted of variations on the original theme.

"But there is no good talking," she said, with great wisdom, at the close of a kind of hysterical attack into which she had worked herself; "something must be done, and you must do it, mamma. You have got us into this scrape, and you must get us out of it."

"Oh! what can I do?"

"There is only one thing to be done—you must write to Sir Walter at once. The concierge will know his address. You must write and say that it was entirely your fault that Joan refused him, and that she is really very much

attached to him. Mind you make that clear, or he won't come back. His touchiness and conceit are beyond anything."

"But, Belinda, what reason can I give for forbidding Joan to accept him?"

"You can't give any. You know quite well there was none."

"Oh! what will he think of me?"

"I am sure I don't know; but he shall not think I am jealous of his proposing to Joan. Now, mamma, here is pen, ink, and paper. Don't sit crying there in that silly way. You know you have behaved very unkindly to poor Joan, and the least you can do is to make amends for it as quickly as possible."

Thus swiftly overtaken by Nemesis did poor Mrs. Grant, with tears of mortification, indite the letter Belinda dictated, and which the writer, for one, would give much to have seen. Unfortunately it is lost to the world. On his journey back from Genoa,

confused either by excess of joy or deficiency of ozone, Sir Walter dropped, mislaid, in any case lost, this remarkable document ; and when, some years later, his mother-in-law took courage to ask him what he thought of it and of her when he read it, all that he could remember was that a more delightful letter he had never received.

Yes, the marriage has been a very happy one, though Lady Montford did not retire to the dower-house, built, so she declares, upon a clay foundation ; and Lady Denby has every reason to be satisfied with a match which—as she often observes, and not without some reason—she made for her sister at the Hôtel d'Angleterre.






II.

THE VIOLIN OBBLIGATO.

THOUGH there was no one "at home" at the old Grange, inhabitants of the newer houses round Leachester driving, as they were permitted to do, through its thickly-wooded park, heard sounds of music issuing from the open windows. It was Sylvia Llanover practising her violin. Lady Llanover had more than one orphan granddaughter to introduce to society. Her plan was to take them all in turn. Sylvia's, though she was past eighteen, had not come yet. Her gover-

ness was gone, but she was still "in the schoolroom," and, whilst her grandmother chaperoned an elder cousin through a London season, passed the summer in solitude. Mrs. Vane, the Dean's wife, bethought herself of this lonely musician when the amateur concert in aid of the new reading-room was at hand, and the beautiful Jessica Graham protested that she could not sing her duet with Mr. Paul Seymour to no more inspiring accompaniment than Mrs. Graham's on the piano. "I wish we could have the violin obbligato, for mamma always plays straight on; one, two, three, as if she were playing to a metronome. It would be such a help to have something a little more sympathetic." Then Mrs. Vane went up to the Grange and used her influence as an old friend of the Llanovers to bring Sylvia and her violin to a rehearsal of the duet which was to take place in Mrs. Graham's drawing-room. Sylvia Llanover was a



fine-skinned, brown-eyed little creature, with a childlike simplicity of manner. The violin part she had studied already. She now asked to look at the song, and attentively considered both music and words. The latter ran something like this:

“Where summer clouds are sailing
Above a sunlit sea
A voice is heard bewailing
The winter that shall be.
How sad this ceaseless sigh
For beauty born to die,
And that high bliss of noon
Which night enshrouds too soon !”

And the refrain went :

“O sweet, our faith shall hold one fort
untaken
In this eternal triumph of decay;
For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-day.”

“The sentiment, of course, is a little high-flown,” said Mrs. Vane, apologetically, and was

then somewhat perplexed by the evident astonishment in Sylvia's eyes, which indeed expressed much the same amazement as Mrs. Vane herself might have felt if some one in her presence had spoken of the Apostles' Creed as high-flown.

"Would they sing it now?" suggested Sylvia, timidly. She was a little shy of these strangers and a good deal dazzled by the colour and glitter of a room furnished and bedizened according to the latest fashion, but all trace of embarrassment vanished as she tuned her violin, and then, taking her place by the violin-stand, just opposite the singers, and the wide-open door-window behind them, stood ready to play but not yet playing, listening and looking. Jessica, glancing upwards from the sheet before her, saw the earnest eyes dilate and darken and gleam as if reflecting some newly-kindled flame. It was a wonderful moment in Sylvia's experience, which had

hitherto been remarkably prosaic. In poems and paintings, but never in real life, had she seen anything like the picture now before her.

Paul Seymour, pale, dark-eyed, and slender, might have posed for Romeo himself; while Jessica, to whom some Spanish ancestors had bequeathed her almond-hued complexion and wonderful dark eyes, with such a figure as ripens usually only under a tropical sun, she might have been the heroine of any tale of passion or romance till she spoke, and her lips curved almost involuntarily into a smile half sweet, half playful, which was more winsome than her beauty. And this most picturesque pair now stood side by side singing from the same page the eulogy of constant love, against a background, which the summer had prepared for them, of flaming scarlet flowers, dewy green foliage and cloudless June sky.

No wonder that Sylvia surpassed herself and surprised her

hearers by her playing, which seemed at once to throw an artistic grace over what had been hitherto a rather commonplace performance. It was as if she had discovered in the music, and now disclosed to others, an alternate pathos and triumph which nobody had suspected. The singers, both of sensitive temperaments, answered quickly to her touch ; they sang as they had never sung before, till, at the close, where Jessica's ringing soprano and Paul's weak but sympathetic tenor rang forth together in the lines :

“For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-
day,”


with the voice of the violin soaring and quivering above them, the effect was such that Mrs. Vane, as she afterwards explained, “felt a cold shiver run down her back.”

“My dear Sylvia,” she then exclaimed, “that is exquisite !

And Jessica was quite right; the addition of the violin is the very greatest improvement, is it not, dear Mrs. Graham?"

"Yes," said the plump matron at the piano, looking kindly round upon the performers, all slightly flushed with the consciousness of success. "It is always a good plan to have more than one instrument to accompany amateurs, as it all helps to hide when they sing out of tune."

The duet was declared to be the gem of the concert. Colonel Graham who, there being no race-meeting that week, happened to be at home was amongst the audience, and highly delighted at his daughter's triumph. He heartily acknowledged Sylvia's contribution thereto, when the concert was over, and in the warmth of his gratitude insisted that she should go home in his carriage instead of bringing out the Dean's, averring, with more courtesy than accuracy,



that the Grange lay very little out of their own way.

"Yes, do come," urged Jessica, with a look and a touch that made Sylvia flush all over with delight ; " I want to know you better."

"Yes," said Colonel Graham, presently, as they drove along through the darkness, " there was nothing to compare with that duet in the whole programme. Miss Llanover, your playing is superb ; and as to you, my darling, though perhaps I ought not to say so, I never heard even a professional sing better. The only pity is that you had no one but young Seymour to sing with : if you had had a real tenor——"

" Mr. Seymour's is a real tenor, papa."

" Rubbish ! it's no more a tenor than your own."

" Excuse me, papa, it is, and everybody considers it so."

" Not anybody who knows anything about music."

"Yes, papa, the very best judges of music in the place."

"There aren't any."

"Do you mean to say Mrs. Vane and Mr. Parsons are not good judges of music?"

"Not if they say young Seymour's voice is a tenor."

"I am afraid you are not much of a judge yourself, papa."

"How dare you speak to me like that—I who, before you were born, was singing myself with some of the first musicians in Europe."

On they went. The Colonel's voice getting louder and louder, and Jessica, in order to be heard, compelled to shout also, till Sylvia, in whose household nobody ever spoke above a nice drawing-room pitch, trembled with agitation.

Mrs. Graham, beside whom she sat, took no part in the discussion, but when it was at its height with great difficulty secured a hearing.

"What is it?" cried her husband, turning fiercely upon her.

"Is the west road the right way to the Grange?"

"Of course it isn't."

"Because Short has just turned down that way."

Upon which the Colonel threw himself half out of the window and, in forcible language, discharged upon the coachman the remainder of his wrath, for the musical contest was not afterwards resumed.

"I will come over and see you to-morrow, if I may," were Jessica's parting words; and she came, driving two fiery chestnuts before her and looking, so it seemed to Sylvia, like a daughter of the gods to whom Apollo might have confided his chariot.

As all the reception rooms were dismantled it was to her own especial sitting-room—the old schoolroom—that Sylvia led her new friend. It seemed sadly bare and dull to Jessica, who felt she

could not have lived two days in a place so unadorned, and even the big bow-window looked out upon greensward and trees, with neither flower-bed nor border. Of books there were plenty, and music in heaps about the cottage piano.

"You play the piano, too; let me sing something to your playing," said Jessica, hunting for a song that she knew. "I feel as if I could sing twice as well when you accompany me."

"Please put yourself where I can see you," said Sylvia, as she took her place at the piano, and her look and voice stirred even Jessica, fed to satiety with admiration.

"You dear little thing!" she cried, at the end; "do you know you have quite won my heart—I who, as a rule, never can get on with girls? Let us be great friends."

She came towards the piano as she spoke, and, smiling, offered her hand; but instead of taking

it Sylvia sat looking at her with grave and startled eyes.

"Why!" exclaimed Jessica, more amazed than piqued, "don't you like me, then?"

"Like you?" repeated Sylvia, with an almost indescribable accent.

"But a friend, a real friend, is such a great thing; and I am not affectionate."

"Not affectionate! No, so I should think."

"No, indeed, I am not affectionate; I do not care very much for many people. In all my life I have only had one real friend. Would you like to see his portrait?"

His too! Jessica was interested, and was willingly conducted across the wide hall, up the broad stone staircase, and along a corridor, floored with slippery oak, to Sylvia's bedroom. It was just over the schoolroom, and even more scantily furnished, with a huge four-post bed in the centre draped with quaintly embroidered

but faded tapestry. Near this, over a little table on which lay well-worn copies of the Bible and Shakespeare, there hung, with a cup of flowers beneath it and a trail of ivy round it as if it had been some sacred image, a photograph which had already turned dim and yellow—the portrait of a man, neither young nor handsome.

“Oh! who is this?” asked Jessica, disappointed.

“It is Uncle Max,” answered Sylvia, in a hushed voice.

“Oh, your uncle! A relation for your friend; how strange!”

“Is that strange? I had neither father nor mother—I mean they died when I was quite a baby—and when I came here Uncle Max was very kind to me. As I grew older he had me a great deal with him, and called me his little friend. Once, when I was ill, Uncle Max nursed me. They thought I would die, but I lived; and Uncle Max died two years afterwards.”

"When was that?" asked Jessica, speaking very softly, in response to the look upon Sylvia's face.

"It was ten years ago."


"Ten years! Why you can hardly remember him, can you?"

"Remember him? I am not sure. When I do not see this picture for some time I can't quite remember his face, but himself—— It's just the same as if he had not died; I know he is living somewhere; sometimes I feel him close to me—here."

"Ah!" cried Jessica, starting with eerie horror.

"But, Sylvia," she added, coaxingly, drawing the girl towards the open window to which the outer world lifted up its freshness and fragrance, "do not think of these sad things. You are going to be my friend, are you not?"

They stood hand in hand silently confronting each other for a little time, Jessica almost magnetized by the steady gaze of the deep dark eyes into which she




looked. Then Sylvia drew a long breath, and, putting her arms round Jessica's beautiful, pliant form, said more solemnly than caressingly, "Yes, I will be your friend."

"Why, this is as bad as a marriage," laughed Jessica, very glad to shake off with a jest the strange impression by which her susceptible nature was overpowered.

Next day, as agreed, Sylvia returned the visit.

"Fancy," said Jessica, complacently — "our concert has paid better than any ever given here. They have made exactly seven pounds—pure profit, you know."

"Seven pounds," said Mrs. Graham, looking up from some drab-coloured socks she was knitting. "And it cost a great deal of trouble ; you've all been working for weeks. And now Mrs. Morton and Miss Peake are laid up with violent colds from com-



ing out into the night air after singing, and the Vernons and the Hardings are not on speaking terms because of that dispute about the first part in the concerted piece. How much better it would have been if each of the performers—let me see—yes, there were just fifteen of them—had each given ten shillings.”

“Mamma has such a horribly matter-of-fact way of looking at things,” complained Jessica to Sylvia later on, as they were sitting in the pink and white nest half boudoir, half dressing-room which Jessica called her own; “though papa is so hot-tempered and so obstinate, poor old darling, when he takes an idea into his head, I get on better with him than mamma, for though she is never cross she is so unsympathetic.”

Then the door-bell rang.

“Ah! visitors, visitors,” cried Jessica, rising with a pretty gesture of impatience. The house indeed was daily beset

with them; young men and maidens, especially young men, some from the Close, more from the garrison, who came to play lawn-tennis and drink afternoon tea and hover, moth-like, about Jessica. Sylvia, though a little dazed by the crowd and its wild spirits, and instinctively retreating from it to Mrs. Graham's side and shelter, could not but approve of the homage to Jessica.

Paul Seymour, who was present, recognized Sylvia, and won her heart by this compliment, delivered with evident feeling: "You play well indeed; you are worthy to accompany Miss Graham." Then he moved away to the lawn, not to play tennis but to watch Jessica acquitting herself in the game with equal dexterity and grace.

Mrs. Graham, looking after him, thoughtfully said, "It seems a pity he should have to go to Egypt."

"Must he go?"

"Well, his cousin, who is a

governor or something there, has promised him some place there, and of course it would be foolish to refuse it as he has no money of his own and it is so difficult to find work for young men now; but I should think a hot climate would not be good for his liver, which must be delicate, he always looks so melancholy. Poor young man! he is quite harmless. Colonel Graham is prejudiced against him because he writes poetry, but I can't see that it is any worse than drinking or gambling, or the other silly things young men will do, and I daresay he will grow out of it."

A few days after this Sylvia came to lunch and practise with Jessica. She found no one in the drawing-room so she strolled through the window-door into the garden, in whose glowing colours her eyes delighted. She went past the long bed where the tropæolums flamed in a circlet of bright blue lobelia, down a long

gravel path, bordered by rose-trees, to where beyond the tennis lawn close growing hollies threw a welcome shade; and here, as the way took a sharp turn, she suddenly came upon Paul and Jessica: he clasping both her hands in his and stooping forward to read her face, which she had half turned from him; but even as Sylvia halted, transfixed by surprise, Jessica moved and lifted her eyes to Paul with one of those looks which, like fine music, put the eloquence of mere words to shame, and as he caught her to him with a murmur of inarticulate delight, Sylvia, conscience-stricken at having seen so much, returned hastily to the house. There, in the drawing-room, she sat with her heart bounding and her brain in a whirl, while Mrs. Graham explained to her the difficulty of having things properly served in a house where people were so unpunctual at meal-times.

The practising after lunch did

not go very well. Jessica was unmistakably inattentive, and at last, tossing the music she held impatiently from her, she said :

“ Sylvia, I have something to tell you.”

“ I think I know what it is. Oh ! Jessica, how——”

Then Sylvia’s voice failed, and she fell upon her friend’s neck and kissed her passionately.

After that Paul came in, and before the stream of visitors began to follow, they sang the duet. Once more Sylvia saw their faces in the same brilliant setting of sunlight and flowers ; they looked into each other’s eyes when they sang the words :

“ For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-day,”

and between the heart-beats of their own delight, the violin seemed to throb with a sympathy of which the passion was greater than their own.

Sylvia could not sleep till late that night, but sat at her open window gazing into the darkness. Above the shadowy masses of the great trees a few stars sparkled ; the air was warm, windless, heavy with scent from the lime-blossoms. The unspeakable beauty of the summer night had a new meaning now that it appeared to her as the frame to a joy so solemn and so lovely.

"I suppose Jessica has told you about this foolish business with young Mr. Seymour?" was Mrs. Graham's opening comment next day. "I think it is quite the silliest freak Jessica has ever had, and one which the Colonel, who is so indulgent to her in most things, will not put up with for a moment."

"Will he object to their engagement?"

"Of course he will, my dear. An engagement is always a most unpleasant and inconvenient thing in a house ; still, if it is to

end in a marriage one feels bound to put up with it, as young people must, of course, be settled in life; but an engagement which never can come to anything is really too much."

"But why should not Jessica marry Mr. Seymour?"

"How could she, my dear? Mr. Seymour has not a penny, and Jessica will not have enough to pay her own expenses. Jessica must marry a rich man. She has such extravagant tastes and always has had everything she wanted."

"They little know me!" cried Jessica, when this speech was, at her own request, repeated to her. "There is no one who cares less for money than I do."

She stood dressed for the Lord Lieutenant's garden-party in a wonderful Parisian gown all of snow-white lace and ribbons, and swung impatiently backwards and forwards as she spoke a long glove delicately perfumed.

"What is the good of expen-

sive things?" she went on, gazing contemptuously round the drawing-room she had herself tricked out so prettily, "they do not make one really happy. Love and sympathy, dear Sylvia, are the only things worth living for."

Sylvia said, "Amen," from her heart, and thought she had never seen Jessica so beautiful as with that look of noble disdain upon her face.

Four or five days passed, and Sylvia, receiving no message from Jessica, hesitated to visit the Grahams again, lest she should obtrude upon the lovers; but she was happier than she had ever been in her loneliness, for now, besides her books and her music, she had a living joy over which she brooded with feelings curiously compounded of the delight of an art-lover in a new-found treasure and of a mother's in her sucking child.


But on the fifth day the key suddenly changed, and Sylvia,

hurrying over in answer to an agitated note from Jessica, found her pacing in stormy sorrow the gay little room which seemed prepared for only happy scenes and faces. Colonel Graham, on his return the day before, had received the news of the engagement as his wife had predicted. He had forbidden Paul to set foot in the house, and Jessica to leave it without her mother lest she should meet or communicate with him.

"If I could only get a message sent to him in some way! I dare not trust the servants."

"Give it to me, then," said Sylvia.

She had intended to post it, but that was not necessary, for on her homeward way she found Paul waiting to meet her and learn how Jessica was. He received the note with such rapture as satisfied even Sylvia, and met her next day, on her road to Beechcroft, with an answering letter to Jessica. In this guile-



sica, taking up a photograph of her lover's and studying it with an exquisite smile. "No, I could never be false to him. Ah! how I love him, Sylvia! I have fancied I cared for other men sometimes, but nothing, nothing like what I feel for him."

But there came a time when the sight of his picture was not enough.

"I can bear it no longer!" she cried, wildly. "Not to see him is bad enough, but never to hear from him or be able to send him the slightest message; it is almost as if he were dead. Sylvia, you must help me."

She paused before her friend, a beautiful image of grief. They were in the rose-coloured dressing-room, and she wore a long white wrapper which twined about her lithe form in folds a sculptor might have copied, while round her "pale, passionate face," her hair, ruffled by the pillows on which she had been resting her head, floated in a soft, dark haze.

"What can I do, darling Jessica? I have promised not to carry notes between you."

"But you have only promised papa, who, you must allow, is treating me cruelly."

"I think his conduct is quite fiendish; but still, dearest Jessica, you know I could not break my word."

This was the saddest episode this melancholy idyl had yet unfolded. Jessica was disappointed with her friend, and Sylvia felt compelled to behave almost brutally.

At last she devised a plan to which Jessica consented because, as she afterwards said, she did not thoroughly understand it. Sylvia went down to the drawing-room and candidly explained that she must withdraw her promise, as she now intended to help Paul and Jessica to correspond.

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Graham, who, fortunately, was the only person present.

"And so I am afraid, Mrs

Graham, that I must not come here any more."

"No, I am afraid not, my dear. It is a pity. What trouble Jessica is causing by all this nonsense, to be sure !"


"I think it is Colonel Graham who is to blame."

"So he is ; for, as I have told him over and over again, if he did not oppose Jessica and go on arguing with her about Mr. Seymour, she would soon be sick of him herself, and we should hear no more about the matter."

Sylvia went home and wrote to Paul to explain that the correspondence was to be resumed, and that he would find Jessica's letters, and might leave his own, in the hollow of a yew-tree to one corner of the Beechcroft grounds, separated from a lane by a wall low enough to be easily surmounted. Then, her chief occupation being gone, she began to discover how the last two or three weeks had exhausted her. She felt too tired to practise or to

study, or even to improvise on her violin in musical day-dreams as of old. She wandered about the park aimlessly, or sat for hours at the open bay-window in the schoolroom gazing into the sunlit green of a resplendent summer, and thinking of the friend she could no longer serve.

But this was not to last long. One morning she received a letter from Paul to say that the fatal hour had sounded; in other words, he had been summoned to Egypt, and must leave home in two days. Would Miss Llanover, who had always been so constant and sympathetic a friend, and whose powers of persuasion were so great, entreat Colonel and Mrs. Graham to grant him an interview with Jessica before he started? Accordingly, in such a mood as would have carried her unflinching into a lion's den, Sylvia presented herself at Beechcroft before the Colonel, as well as Mrs. Graham, to make this astonishing demand.



At first only sound and fury followed as the Colonel, walking up and down the room, denounced loudly, and in the strongest terms, the folly of Jessica, the insolence of Paul, and the impertinence of outsiders who ventured to meddle in his domestic affairs. Sylvia, comprehending a signal from Mrs. Graham, sat mute and motionless the while. At last, when the Colonel's fury was partly, and his breath for the moment wholly, spent, Mrs. Graham observed, "I cannot see myself any objection to their meeting."

Then ensued more raging.

"It can do no harm," continued Mrs. Graham, at the next lull, "as they are not likely to see each other again."

Sylvia bit her lip as if in pain, and the Colonel angrily objected that Seymour unfortunately was not going for life, and would be home again in a few years.

"But by that time Jessica will be married, or, if not, she will

have certainly forgotten all about him."


After that the storm gradually subsided, and a very ungracious consent was obtained.

"But I won't have them writing to each other," roared the Colonel; "no correspondence mind!"

"They will correspond, whatever you say, my dear; you cannot prevent it; but it will not be for long, as Jessica, luckily, cannot bear letter-writing."

"And now there is to be an end of this confounded folly, I suppose Miss Llanover can come here again," said the Colonel, departing, with a sudden softening of the heart towards his old favourite.

"I hope so, indeed," said his wife. "My dear, I am quite concerned to see you look so ill. You take all this a great deal too seriously. Why, in a week or two Jessica and Mr. Seymour will have forgotten all about it and be as happy as possible."



But this kind of consolation was more distasteful to Sylvia than the Colonel's raging.

When Sylvia drove over to Beechcroft next day she found a fly laden with luggage waiting before the hall door, and as she alighted from the carriage Paul came hurrying out. He pressed her hand before he sprang into the fly, but spoke not a word, even of farewell, but for weeks afterwards, when she was wakeful or feverish at night, his face as it looked then would rise before her, painted on the darkness, and make her wince again.

In the drawing-room she found Jessica lying upon the floor with her head resting on the sofa, crying as Sylvia had never heard her cry before, with long sobs more piteous than moaning. Sylvia, sitting down on the floor beside her, silently drew the beautiful head to her shoulder, and there held it close pressed to her cheek, as mothers often hold the babe they comfort.

Meanwhile, through the open door-window, she looked into the sunlit garden, where the birds were singing and the butterflies flittering and the flowers glowing jewel-wise in the radiant summer day, and felt she had passed into the shadow from which nature holds aloof.

But Jessica grew calmer by degrees, and began to speak about Paul's grief and her own.

"Oh, our time together was so short. He does not sail till to-morrow night, but he must spend to-night at Thornbury, between here and Southampton, with his uncle—the uncle who helped to get him this appointment. So he had to hurry off before I had time to say half I wanted to, and—— Ah! my lock of hair!"

She started up in sudden dismay and drew from her bosom a tiny parcel folded in silver paper.

"I cut it off on purpose for him, and now I have forgotten

to give it him, and he forgot to remind me. Oh, how miserable he will be when he remembers it ! Now he has no keepsake of mine, poor darling ! ”

“ What time does his train go ? ” cried Sylvia, running to look at the clock. “ Perhaps I shall have time to catch him before it starts. ”

“ Oh, you darling ! You might just catch him, perhaps, if you took the short way to the station, across the fields from our back gate. I will show you. ”

They were both in the garden, now running together down the gravel path.

“ Jessica, have you any money ? If I miss him after all, I could follow him by the next train. ”


“ Oh, you little angel ! Would you ? Here is my purse. Straight on, along this path till you come to the road again ; then to your right, and you will soon see the station. Good-bye, you darling little thing. Oh, get it to him somehow ! ”

"He shall have it," Sylvia called over her shoulder.

But when she reached the station Paul's train had started and the next did not leave for two hours, during which time she underwent that "*peine forte et dure*" of which railway stations are too often the scene. She might have profitably spent some minutes in eating, for it was past two and she had had no lunch, but she was too ignorant and too shy to find her way to the refreshment room, having always hitherto journeyed in royal fashion, with attendants who did everything for her. A porter took her ticket and found a place for her, and about five she reached Thornbury station. There she learned that Mr. Seymour's place lay nearly six miles from the station, and, at the station-master's suggestion, taking an open waggonette which chanced to be waiting, she drove on thither across a high and bleak down country.

Meantime heavy grey clouds

were drawing over the bright sky, and a chill wind from the west blew fitfully. Sylvia, in a cotton gown which had been warm enough when she started, shivered a little, as, emerging from a beech avenue, the waggonette drew up before the portico of a big house. To her unspeakable relief, Paul was declared to be within, and presently came out to speak with her. Though at first amazed to see her, he was afterwards so transported with joy at sight of the precious token which she brought him that he could think of nothing else. He was still standing in a kind of ecstasy on the doorsteps as they drove off, and only some minutes later, when the rain was falling heavily, did it occur to him that Sylvia appeared to have neither wrap nor umbrella with her. To Sylvia herself, who would have gone through fire, much less water, on behoof of her friends in their affliction, the rain seemed of little consequence seeing the



main point was now secured ; but even her sense of relief could not prevent her feeling chilled to the bone in her dripping garments when she reached the tiny station where neither food nor fire was to be found. At Seachester she had wits enough left, faint and dizzy though she was, to order a fly, and finally arrived at the Grange, so weary that she could hardly climb the long stairs to her bedroom or swallow the hot milk which the frightened women-servants entreated her to take.

After this she was in bed for three weeks.

"And it is all so unnecessary," cried Mrs. Graham, when she heard the whole story, "for the hair might have gone just as well by post ; he would have had it next morning, which would have been quite time enough. It was not a thing he wanted that very night, like his tooth-brush or his night-dress."

Both she and Jessica visited

it is nearly four weeks since he left, I feel just as devoted to him as ever. I assure you, come what may, I never, never can care for any other man."

"Dear Jessica ! Could I think so for a moment ? "

"But oh, dear, how hopeless it all seems at times," said Jessica, rising and strolling towards the piano. There, standing, she let her fingers drop upon the keys and began playing, absently, the chords of the duet. Towards the close she sang very softly :

"For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-day."

Sylvia, with her eyes closed and her head thrown back against the window-sill, bit her nether lip to keep it from trembling. It was not only Jessica's voice she heard ; Paul's tender tenor mingled with it, and the cry of her own violin. She felt the warm air of June upon her face, she

saw the green garden vista and the scarlet and azure flowers, and, before all and above all, the two young faces alight with the rapture of first love.

"Ah me!" said Jessica, as she turned from the piano and began to pull on her gloves, "I sometimes think that Paul and I will never sing that together again."

"Oh don't, Jessica!" cried Sylvia, putting out her hand, as if to ward off something; "that 'never again,' is such a terrible word—I cannot bear it."

Mrs. Graham also came over to say good-bye to Sylvia and to give her excellent advice concerning tonics and milk.

"Dear dear! how ill you do look! This love affair of Jessica's has nearly been the death of you. I do trust you will forget all about it now, as I assure you Jessica will directly she has something fresh to think about."

And now the weather be-

came brighter, and Sylvia's small, wan face began to grow a shade less colourless and thin. Presently the wail of the violin was heard again and her old occupations were resumed. The first glow of the early summer was not to be recovered, but a sober restfulness of spirit had fallen upon her like the calm of the still September days now brooding over all the sunlit land. Towards the middle of that month, for the first time since he left, Paul missed a mail. Sylvia was disappointed, and when he missed the second also, much concerned. But the following week she was consoled by a letter.

"Has he been ill?" she inquired when she forwarded it to Jessica; but Jessica, it would seem, was too busy to answer, the short notes in which she sent her various addresses containing beside them only hurried assurances that she had no time to say more. After this came another and a longer gap in Paul's cor-

respondence, and the letter which followed was lighter than any of his others. Then three whole weeks passed without a word from him. To Sylvia's equal comfort and relief Jessica in her next letter made no comment on this omission. She merely said that her address would be as it had been for two weeks now: Denbury Castle, Ludleigh, Loamshire, till Thursday next, when they all returned to Beechcroft. In a postscript she besought Sylvia to come over to lunch on Friday. That a letter from Paul might arrive before that day was now Sylvia's constant prayer; and it was granted. On Thursday afternoon, when she came in from a long ramble through the park, she found that the afternoon's post had brought her a letter in the well-known handwriting. But the inner enclosure was not addressed as usual to Jessica; It was for Sylvia herself. She sat down in the old window seat to read it, with a vague pre-

sentiment of coming grief. It was a very long, a needlessly long, letter such as people are apt to write when they have something unpleasant to confess. The pith of it was contained in this sentence, which followed a rather involved and bewildering preface:

"You will gather from this that my feelings towards Jessica have undergone some change, and though I shall always entertain for her the highest respect and affection, I cannot honestly say that she still holds the first place in my heart. Of course I shall abide by my promise if she, still, under the circumstances, should wish me to do so. I trust to you, dear Miss Llanover, who have always been such a friend to us both, to explain this to Jessica, and let me know her decision!"

Sylvia put her hand up to her head as if it had been struck. Her brain indeed reeled as if from a blow. Through the window, which she had forgotten to shut, the air came keen and cold,

for over the darkening elms and their shadow glowed the delicate rose of a sharp frost, and from far away, from some distant world, rapt in sunlight and warmth, came to her, like a mocking echo, the words and the music :

“ For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-day.”

“ It will kill Jessica,” she thought first ; then, remembering the assurance of all the storytellers, “ No ; grief does not kill. She will not die : worse—she will live with a broken heart.”

But as to telling Jessica, she did not waver, holding it even worse to have left her to waste her love and faith on one so unworthy. So, after a night spent chiefly in imaginary rehearsals of the terrible task before her, she drove over to Beechcroft by woods and gardens which the frost had seared. Her

knees shook together as she crossed the hall behind the servant who ushered her in. "Should she find Jessica alone?" The answer to this, as the drawing-room door opened before her, was a burst of chatter and laughter. The room was crowded as of old with Jessica's merry little court of admirers and companions. Mrs. Vane was there, too, and a man whom Sylvia had never seen before, short and red-faced. All this she perceived in a flash, before Jessica came hastily across the room to welcome her: Jessica, not more beautiful than before—that in Sylvia's eyes was impossible—but brilliant, like a flower that more showers have revived.

"You darling, how glad I am to see you! Little frog, you are as cold as if it were winter."

Sylvia hardly heard what she said, or Mrs. Graham's kind greeting, and as they turned to welcome another visitor she sank into a seat beside Mrs.

Vane. It had become suddenly clear to her that her errand was even more cruel than she had thought. But Mrs. Vane was talking, and Sylvia at last became aware of what she was saying.

" . . . and long settled out there and very rich. So of course all the Seymours are very pleased. It is a much more suitable engagement than—— Well, I am glad they have both been so sensible about it."

As Sylvia wondered what she meant by "both," Jessica came gliding towards her.

"Dear little mouse! I am pleased you have not forgotten your violin. We want to try the duet after lunch. I have been singing it a good deal at Denbury Castle with our host, but it never sounds anything without your obbligato. By the by, he is to take you into luncheon. Let me introduce Sir Walter Lawley."

It was the short red-faced man.

"You play the violin a good deal, don't you?" he said, as they crossed the hall. "Well, I like it very much with the piano. Rather squeaky by itself, don't you know, but with something else it has a nice lively effect. I should think it would be a great improvement to that duet, especially as the tenor part is miles too high for me."

After that, becoming seriously interested in the luncheon, which was a remarkably excellent one, he said little more, and Sylvia spoke even less. She sat like one in a dream, a horrible dream, before the sparkling flower-crowned table with happy faces all around her, while the china and the silver tinkled, and the young people, led by Jessica, greeted each other with jesting words and laughed exuberantly at nothing, as is the pleasant way of youth and health.

Colonel Graham, who was evidently in the best of tempers, twice sent the butler to tempt

her with champagne. "To bring back those roses of yours," he called, nodding kindly to the little white face.

"Are you a teetotaller?" asked Sir Walter, disapprovingly.

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Graham, who sat at the other side of Sir Walter, "Jessica has something nice to tell you after lunch—such good news, that will cheer you up."

Good news! The words seemed to wring her heart. She felt faint even to sickness as she climbed upstairs after Jessica, who led the way with a step so light it was like dancing, to that well-known pink and white dressing-room freshly set out in snow-white laces and crisp new bows.

"But first let me show you my new ulster."

"Not yet—not yet," gasped Sylvia, taking her friend's hands in hers. "Oh, Jessica, sit down here with me, I have something to tell you. Darling, can you be very brave? Can you bear to

hear terrible news—to know that the one you most trusted is—is——”

Sylvia broke down, all the more hopelessly because the amazement in the blooming face before her showed her that her words failed to convey any suspicion of what she meant to Jessica.

“I cannot tell you,” she cried, thrusting Paul’s letter into Jessica’s hands. “And you would not—you could not believe—you must read it for yourself.”

Then she hid her face in her hands and waited till when, at last, she felt Jessica move and touch her gently on the head, she started up, and, throwing herself on her knees before her outraged friend, covered her hands with tears and kisses.

“Dear little Sylvia, don’t cry like this. Mamma is quite right; you take things much too seriously.”

There was something not so much in the words as in the tone

which made Sylvia instantly choke back the tears and look up quickly into Jessica's face. The beautiful dark eyes, undimmed by tears, were full of pitying concern.

"You poor little thing, you have quite disfigured your dear little face with crying."

She stretched out her long, white hand towards a crystal scent-bottle that stood upon a table near her, and, steeping her filmy handkerchief in its contents, began softly bathing Sylvia's forehead.

"You see, darling, I am not altogether surprised at what has happened, and not the least offended. I cannot blame Paul, poor fellow, for falling in love with somebody else—I could not expect him to go on caring only for me when there seemed no chance of our engagement ever coming to anything. It was quite hopeless, you know. Papa would never have consented, and I could not possibly marry against

his wishes. I should have had nothing to live upon, and besides, it would have been quite wrong, I consider. So I am only too glad Paul takes so sensible a view of it all. It is quite a relief to me, as it makes it much pleasanter for me to tell him what I had come to think about it myself; for since I have been away and thought things over calmly, I have seen how foolish it was to go on fretting for a thing one couldn't have—like a child crying for the moon, you know—instead of trying to make the best of things, and being content with life as one finds it. I had quite determined, as much for Paul's own good as for my own, to break off our engagement—in fact, I have all but promised to marry Sir Walter Lawley, indeed I think he considers that I have quite promised, and he has ordered the engagement ring. I am sure you will like him, dear. He is not exactly clever, but such a darling, so sensible and solid,

just what one likes in a husband, you know, and—and I assure you Sylvia”—here Jessica blushed softly, and dropped her long lashes with the loveliest smile—“I never could have believed I should care so much for anybody as I do for him. I never——”

A knock at the door interrupted her. Mrs. Graham had sent up to know if the young ladies could come down and try over the duet before Mrs. Vane left. Jessica went down at once, leaving Sylvia behind to bathe her face and smooth her ruffled locks, and while she helped her mother to get out the music and the stand, whispered to her Sylvia’s gratifying tidings.

“Well, that is a comfort!” cried Mrs. Graham. “And now I do hope Sylvia will be happy.”

She was a little disappointed when Sylvia entered, quiet and composed indeed, but very pale. Everybody arranged themselves to listen.

"This is a treat I have been quite looking forward to," cried Mrs. Vane.

"Ah! now you will hear how it sounds with a real tenor," cried Colonel Graham.

"Dear papa," said Jessica, smiling indulgently on him; "he thinks everything Walter does perfection. Stand here, sir, and remember to sing well out at the *crescendo*."

"It's rather soon after lunch," said Sir Walter, clearing his throat, huskily.

"One, two, three," cried Mrs. Graham, in an admonitory tone.

They began, and the well-known harmonies floated through the room. The singers stood as before, just between Sylvia and the door-window. It had been thrown open to the sunny afternoon, and she could see through it a sky as blue as that of June itself; but the boughs that crossed it were shrivelled and brown, the tropæolum was like cinders, and the lobelia like ashes.

The first verse went very well, though the obligato might have been a trifle louder ; during the next four lines the violin grew fainter and faltered ; finally it ceased altogether, leaving the voices to sing unsupported—save by the piano—the words :

“ For we shall breast the storm of time
unshaken,
And love to-morrow as we love to-
day.”

“ I beg your pardon,” said Sylvia meekly, “ but I feel rather faint, and I think perhaps I had better go home.”

Everybody was concerned. Colonel Graham and Jessica besought her not to go, but Mrs. Graham declared it was the wisest thing to do.

“ And now Sylvia, my dear,” she said, when she had forced her to drink some wine and wrapped a shawl about her, “ we shall expect you to perk up and look well again, for you know there is nothing left to grieve about.

Jessica is quite happy and so is Mr. Seymour, and everything has ended as comfortably as possible."

They all came out on the door-steps to see her go, and bid her come back very soon.

"You must get strong and well by the middle of next month," were Jessica's last words, "to be my bridesmaid."

As the curve of the gravel sweep brought the departing carriage opposite the portico again, they were still there. Jessica kissed her hand to Sylvia, who was leaning forward towards the carriage window to look at them. They formed so happy a domestic group—Jessica, her lovely face bright with pleasure, standing between her lover and her father. No one was missed: why should he be, since, equally forgetful of them, he too was happy and contented?

Sylvia could but repeat to herself Mrs. Graham's incontrovertible words:

“ There was nothing to grieve
for ; everybody was satisfied ; all
had ended well.”





III.

A RAINY DAY.

THE day began well—too well, in fact, for towards noon its radiance was overclouded. A shadow fell on those crabbed German characters which Lydia invariably studied after breakfast, and on the silk and straw of which Madge, who did nothing invariably, was compounding a bonnet.

“I trust and hope,” cried the latter, with dramatic fervour, “that it is not going to rain.”

From the depths of her heart Lydia re-echoed the wish, but she

said nothing, as was her fashion when she felt much.

Madge, in this as in most things the opposite to her sister, continued: "Oh, no, I will not believe it; it could not be so cruel. It was only a cloud passing over the sun."

She rose as she spoke, and, putting the unfinished headgear upon her chestnut curls, examined her reflection in the long mirror over the console. For a moment the light played brightly on the girlish vision, then the shadow fell again.

She went to the open window and looked out. The cloud which was slowly stifling the sun with fold upon fold of delicate grey vapour had covered all the brilliant blue which arched so brightly above the opening day, and with that had vanished too the flame-like brilliancy of the geraniums in the garden and the roses about the window.

"Thomas," she called, anxious-

ly, "do you think it is going to rain?"

Thomas paused in his work of rolling the lawn, and resting on the handle of the roller inspected the sky with a look of profound calculation.

"I doant know 'zackly, Miss, but it looks as ef we met have zum wet ; but then again it met pass awf."

"I could tell as much as that myself," murmured Madge, impatiently leaving the room for the hall outside it, where, beside the fishing-rods, an aneroid was suspended on the varnished wall. The movable hand was exactly over the other, as it had been placed that morning early by the master of the house, and both pointing directly to "Change". vouchsafed no more definite information than Thomas. Madge tapped the glass. The needle vibrated, but not in one direction more than another ; she tapped it again and it seemed to rise. She was about to persevere in a

mode of treatment which was so efficacious when a door behind her opened and there appeared an elderly gentleman, with a pen in his hand and an expression of strong irritation on his finely-cut features.

"I think I have before explained to you, Margaret, that an aneroid is not a drum. It is not intended to be thumped in that violent manner, and will only be injured by so doing. I do wish you would adopt some other method of studying the weather."

Madge made no reply—a remarkable circumstance, as, generally speaking, she must have the last word, but hastily re-entering the drawing-room exclaimed:

"Oh, I was in such a fright lest he should happen to look at the umbrella-stand."

"And why——" began Lydia, then paused, as their doubts and hopes were finally settled by a sound outside upon the gravel terrace, and she looked round to see the fair flat pastoral view all

blurred and veiled by a sheet of fine rain which fell not heavily but steadily, after the manner of things which are likely to continue.

"It is pouring," said Madge, with a look of such dismay as was not often seen upon her happy face.

"It will rain all day," said Lydia, her dark eyes, beneath their delicate brows, distended with almost tragic intentness.

"It is all right for you," said Madge, enviously, with her face still close to the window-pane, "for now you will not be obliged to go to the Lawsons."

"No," Lydia somewhat faintly made answer, "Uncle Bertram would not like the carriage to go out in such weather."

"Of course not; besides, how could they possibly expect you—especially as it isn't a party? What an escape for you!"

Lydia was silent; unable to explain the real state of her feelings.

In a neighbourhood where the standard of liveliness was far from high, the dulness of the Lawson family was a proverb. Even in their own house they did not attempt to keep up that ball of conversation which in country districts is apt to be so heavy. They sat still and listened to such remarks as might be made to them, replying as shortly as possible, till the mental stagnation, which apparently held them tongue-tied, spread gradually from them to their guests. The brightest languished, the most talkative faltered; and the visit ended in melancholy silence.

And this was the family with whom Lydia longed to pass an afternoon, as, perhaps, in her brief life, she had never longed for anything.

"The first bell has rung," said Uncle Bertram, significantly, as he entered. "And what is all that upon the floor?"

In indirect answer Madge commenced forthwith to gather up the various scraps with which, as was her custom when working, she had bestrewn the ground far and near, while Lydia departed with her Schiller and her dictionary. She crossed the hall with one dejected glance at the uncomfortable aneroid, mounted by the oak staircase, to a landing furnished with well-filled book-cases, engravings, and china, and, through one of the five or six doors that opened on to it, entered her own room—a quaint chamber with a very low ceiling, polished wood floor, white draperies and a square casement, about which great bunches of wisteria drooped. Through this casement, when she had finished drying her long, pink-tipped fingers, she stood gazing wistfully. The ground sloped upward on this side of the house to a row of close-set elms, so she seemed to look into an almost skyless world of living green, all sad-coloured

and rain-bedewed ; but of this she beheld nothing, for quite another scene was before her, and that, too, from the not very distant past.

It was at a large garden-party which the Lawsons, with praiseworthy energy, had roused themselves to give about three weeks ago. She had played her turn at tennis and was resting, apart from the main body of onlookers, on a shady seat by the river. Eva Lawson sat beside her. It was not, perhaps, her right place as a hostess; but, seeing what her social talents were—or, rather, were not—she was probably as useful there as anywhere else. At any rate she left Lydia free in a kind of day-dream to watch the clear waters gliding past over the many-coloured pebbles and the long, silken tresses of the weeds. At last, however, Eva was moved to speak.

“Here is Mr. Calvert.”

“Who is Mr. Calvert?” asked Lydia, without the slightest desire to know.

"Oh, one of the fishing club. He is a friend of Uncle Edward's, so we allow him to fish in our grounds. I think he is coming here now."

"I hope not," Lydia was unsociable enough to say.

A step on the gravel heralded his approach ; but Lydia tried hard not to look round, even when Eva made haste to introduce the new-comer, which, in her anxiety to throw the onus of entertaining him on somebody else, she did before she had answered his greeting.

A tall figure in the untidy dress affected by men when they go trout-fishing was all that Lydia saw, or cared to see—till he spoke. She was sensitive to voices, and his was rich and soft and deep, suggestive of the tenderness and the strength of true manhood ; so that, though he said only commonplace things in commonplace sentences, as, indeed, under the circumstances, was almost inevitable, she was

irresistibly drawn as she listened to look at the speaker. And no sooner did she turn towards him her hitherto averted eyes than he hurriedly appealed to her about some matter of no moment, in a manner so humble and with a glance so reverent it might have conciliated a much less gracious lady. Then, as on wings, did their converse seem to advance. In ten minutes they were talking as if they had known each other for years : of pictures, and books, and plays, of opinions and tastes, and even of feelings, till, when the tea-bell rang Lydia heard it with unwonted regret.

The handle of her door was violently agitated as if some one was trying to wrench it out, and then, as Lydia was, by this characteristic action, prepared to see, Madge came, or rather fell, into the room.

"I think you ought to knock," her sister mildly observed.

"I know I ought, but I am much too anxious to think of

such a trifle as manners. What is to become of me if Uncle Bertram should take it into his head to go out ? ”

“ Why, what does it matter ? ”

“ Matter ! Why he will find out that his umbrella is gone.”

“ Gone ! Where ? ”

“ Ha ! I only wish I knew ! Did I not tell you ? Yesterday, when we were starting for the Smarts, and it looked as if it were going to rain, I couldn’t find my umbrella ; so—you see there was no time to lose, you were in the pony carriage and Jerry was rearing and plunging—so I just took Uncle Bertram’s.”

“ Oh ! Madge, how could you ? ”

“ It’s all very well to say ‘ how could I ’ ! How could I not, pray ? I was not going to have my best hat spoiled, and I did not know the rain would keep off till to-day. However, that is not the worst of it. When we got to the Smarts I put the umbrella into the umbrella stand.”

"You ought not to have let it out of your hands all day."

"My dear Lydia, you are really too absurd. How could I play lawn-tennis with an umbrella in my hands? and where could it be safer than in the stand?"

"Well, then, did you find it there?"

"Well, no, I did not. When I came to look for it it was gone. Some brute had taken it."

The gong sounded and they went to lunch in the brown wainscoted dining-room, hung with dark and indistinct paintings, by old masters, which Uncle Bertram had collected in Belgium and France. As they ate their lunch, Lydia with affected and Madge with unaffected interest—for the trouble was yet to come which could diminish her appetite—they debated the possibility of its clearing or not clearing, till at last their uncle observed:

"There is no clearer sign of

an empty mind than a habit of discussing the weather. To say once for all that the day is fine or wet, hot or cold, may be allowable, though it is quite unnecessary, seeing it is a fact which every one can discover for himself; but to make such circumstances a subject of prolonged conversation, or chatter rather, for conversation it cannot be called, is quite unpardonable."

"All the same, I should like to know whether it is going to clear," said Madge, who was not easily abashed, "as, if not, we can't go out."

"Well, even then, I presume you have resources enough to enable you to exist indoors for one day; and if you have any imperative call to go out it is not impossible if you go properly prepared. I myself intend going over to Mr. Smart's to see this new find of his which he declares is a Van de Velde."

"Not in this rain, surely, Uncie! you will get soaked."

"No, my dear Madge, not with my umbrella, which is a very different thing to those flimsy *en-tout-cas*, as you call them, which you and Lydia are fond of using. I selected it with great care at the Stores when I was last in town. It was expensive, but I flatter myself it was worth the money."

"You won't go out directly after lunch, will you, Uncle?"

"No; I shall wait to see what the afternoon post brings."

There was thus about one hour and a half left in which to avoid discovery.

"I know what I shall do," confided Madge to Lydia, when they returned to the drawing-room—"I will send Thomas for the umbrella."

"Where will you send him?"

"First to the Smarts, to see if by any chance the umbrella has been returned; then to the Woods and the Marshs, to see if they have taken it. As they were the only people at the

party one of them must have taken it."

"I only wish you had a better messenger than Thomas, poor thing! he is so—so——"

"Hopelessly idiotic. But I shall make it so plain that even a hopeless idiot could not make a mistake."

The first thing was, through the instrumentality of Lizbeth, the parlour-maid, to summon Thomas from the kitchen-garden; the next, to interview him at the pantry window as being the furthest removed from the study whereto Mr. Bertram Dacres had again betaken himself.

To the long and lucid explanation of his mission which Madge unfolded Thomas listened as was his custom, not merely with an attentive but with an almost solemnly thoughtful countenance, as of one whose whole mind is concentrated on the matter before him.

"And now, Thomas, you

clearly understand what I want you to do?"

"Oh, yes, Miss, I onderstands all right. Furst I be to go to Mrs Smart's wi' master's ombrella."

But at last a clearer view of his task seemed borne in upon him and he went off to saddle Jerry, crossing the yard in deference to Madge's exhortations to make haste, at a kind of trot considerably slower than a brisk walk would have been.

In the drawing-room Lydia was reading, not for the first time, two little notes, which on Madge's re-entrance she slipped hurriedly under the violet satin square she was embroidering with saffron silk. And yet all the world might have read the conventional sentences with which, in the one, Mr. Calvert accepted Miss Dacre's invitation to tea and tennis, and in the other entreated her acceptance of the new book which she had desired to see. Lydia had read

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these curt and prosaic compositions over and over again; they afforded her a pleasure the like of which she had never experienced and which she would have thought it impossible for any one else to understand or describe. To-day it occurred to her that perhaps Mendelssohn had felt something akin to it. For Madge who had sat down to practise her scales suddenly changed to a more tuneful and harmonious strain. She began playing, with her peculiar liquid touch, an allegro of Mendelssohn's, sparkling as a sunny spring morning, with an undertone of caressing tenderness of which Lydia felt for the first time the significance as well as the beauty. For Lydia, though renowned for her common sense and her practical abilities, was not of an artistic temperament or a romantic disposition, and it had required nothing less than the process of falling in love to open her eyes—or should we

say heart?—to one great side of human nature and the art which interprets it.

The door opened and the music ceased.

"If you please, Miss," said Lizbeth, "Mrs. Smart sends her love, and she has looked everywhere for the umbrella but she cannot find it."

"Well, is that all?"

"That is the message Thomas gave me, Miss."

"Oh! that——" Madge murmured, with a long-drawn breath, before she fled from the room to confront and catechise this most inexperienced messenger.

"Did I not tell you three times at least that if you did not find the umbrella you were to go straight on to Mrs. Wood's and to Mrs. Marsh's to see if it was there?"

"Certainly, Miss, certainly," said Thomas, evidently perplexed; "but I thought as 'ow you would like fur to know as it weren't at Mrs. Smart's."

"What does it matter to me where it is not! Oh, dear! how much precious time you have lost! Pray be off as fast as you can, first to Mrs. Wood's and then to Mrs. Marsh's, and don't come back without the umbrella. You know what it is like, don't you? Green silk with a silver handle."

Meantime Lydia was still struggling against despair. One forlorn hope at least remained: it might clear; and if it did so within half an hour, she might still take tea with the Lawsons. She went to the window and peered eagerly out. Alas! on every side rain, rain, rain; not a gleam, not a break in all that sullen sky. A ring at the front door bell made her start, but when the drawing-room door opened a few minutes afterwards only Madge came in.

"It was the post, but there was nothing for us, everything was for Uncle Bertram. And it was the greatest mercy," ex-

plained Madge, who only the day before had bitterly complained of a similar circumstance, "as it will keep him employed for a time. It is raining less heavily, I fancy, but he will still want his umbrella."

"If the rain is not so bad perhaps the Lawsons might expect me," said Lydia, wistfully looking towards the window.

"Oh, gracious! no," answered Madge, with the kindest intentions. "It is not like a party. There is no one to meet you?"

"No—that is—unless any one should happen to drop in."

"But who is there to drop in in? All the fishing men have gone, you know."

But they had not all gone, as Lydia knew on the very best authority; and, alas! the last of them, and the only one for whom Lydia cared a straw, would leave to-morrow. Had he not himself told her so the day before yesterday at the tennis-meeting, where he arrived so late as to make it

a wonder to all but a few preternaturally sharp-sighted onlookers why he arrived at all?

"If I look in at the Lawsons on Thursday, then, I shall be sure to find you, shall I not? I leave on Friday; my rooms are wanted, and I have not had a chance of speaking to you to-day in this crowd."

He spoke the last words in an aggrieved tone, as if the hostess had shown a want of proper feeling in asking any one besides Lydia and himself to her party; but his resentment, though irrational, had not been altogether displeasing to her.

"Is any one coming with me?" asked Mr. Dacres, looking in. "I am just starting. No? Not even Madge? I suppose you have mislaid your umbrella as usual. Never mind, you shall have a share of mine—it is exceptionally large."

He smiled indulgently. Evidently his letters had been of a

most agreeable character, and he was in the sweetest temper, which only rendered the impending catastrophe the more deplorable.

"Oh, Lydia, Lydia!" cried Madge, as the door closed behind him, "What shall I do?"

The answer to this piteous outcry was a ring at the door. Lizbeth looked in a few minutes later to see if "Master" was there, as John Smith wanted to see him.

It was a reprieve, and a very valuable one, as the interview was not likely to be brief, seeing it concerned a certain cabinet designed by Mr. Dacres and executed by Smith, over which they had now, for full six weeks, been quarrelling, as a dignified gentleman and a respectful artizan can quarrel; each being secretly but profoundly convinced of the other's total ignorance of the business on hand. "For what," as Mr. Dacres so often asked his nieces, "can an igno-

rant bumpkin like that know of artistic fitness?"

Just as Smith propounded to his wife the riddle: "What does 'ee know about such work? Why 'ee couldn't make so much as a rabbit hutch."

Five o'clock struck, and the ever-welcome tea-tray appeared, but for once De Quincey's dictum was at fault, and happiness did not enter with it. Madge indeed managed to consume a respectable quantity of thin bread and butter, and even cake, as well as two cups of tea, but not, she professed, with so keen an enjoyment as usual.

"But why do not you eat something, Lydia? *You* have not lost an umbrella! What is that?"

It was Lizbeth carrying a long brown-paper parcel.

"If you please, Miss, Thomas have brought the umbrella."

"Oh, bless him! bless him!" cried Madge, snatching at the

parcel, and tearing it open in frantic haste; then suddenly followed an exclamation of a different character, low and deep.

"What is the matter?" asked Lydia, rather languidly.

"Look!" cried Madge, in tones of withering scorn—"look at Uncle Bertram's brand new silk umbrella, with the silver handle!"

And she held forth at arm's length, as if it had been some noxious reptile which could sting, an umbrella whose handle was of the most unpretending description, whose gingham cover—dark brown in hue—had been worn and even perforated by "winter and rough weather."

"But what is this about?" asked Lydia, picking up a note which had fallen to the floor, and handing it to her sister.

Madge read it aloud, with her own interpolations:

"DEAREST MADGE,—We have

searched all over the house [Well, that need not take long: one would suppose she lived in a palace!] and cannot find your umbrella, unless it is this one, which has been lying here for weeks. [Idiot! when it was lost only yesterday!] I fancy I have seen you with one something like it. [That I am sure she has not; no one ever saw me with anything so vulgar and shabby!] Hoping it is the right one, I remain, yours affectionately,

“CAROLINE WOOD.”

She finished by dashing the umbrella into the fireplace, where fortunately there was no fire, only the next instant to recover it with equal impetuosity, and conceal it, together with its string and paper wrappings, just as, with his usual deliberate step, Mr. Dacres was heard approaching.

While Mr. Dacres sipped his tea, and descanted on the combined obstinacy and conceit with

which for more than an hour he had been contending, Lydia slipped quietly away. She climbed the stairs as if she had been walking for miles, and when she reached her room threw herself upon her little bed and buried her head in its snowy counterpane. She was crying — yes, literally crying — the sedate and sensible Lydia, least given of all girls to hysterical outbreaks — she was crying because she could not go out to tea. Yet no, that did not fairly state her case, she protested, defending herself against herself; and raising her head and supporting it on her hands, she gazed thoughtfully before her, though whether the real explanation was more to her credit she was not quite so certain. Into what state of mind had she allowed herself to drift, that her happiness should depend on the sight of one who perhaps cared little whether he saw her or no? True, he had seemed to seek her

society, but perhaps that might be only because they had so many interests in common; and as to the looks and the words which had seemed once to mean so much, in the shadow of this most depressing day their sweet significance faded, as glowing colour vanishes in the flowers which we carry from the sunlight to the shade.

Yes, doubtless she had been very foolish, building the loveliest of castles on foundations slighter than the clouds. But if he did not care for her, it was the more likely he would go on the morrow, perhaps never to return: so the rain had deprived her of her one last hope of seeing him and hearing him speak!

In the bitterness of this thought she pressed her lips together and shut her eyes, as if wincing from bodily pain, but when she opened them again her tears gleamed like a dazzling mist before her, and she felt the warm touch of sunlight on her

hands and face. It came straight through the casement from the west, where, just above the elm-tops, in a sea of blue between the parting rain-clouds, the sun shone gloriously on the declining day. Alas! like so many good things, his triumph came too late. At half-past five there was no decent pretext for keeping an engagement to afternoon tea.


"Oh, Lydia! only think!" cried Madge, bursting into the room; "it is all right—the umbrella has come. What is the matter—a headache? Oh, poor dear! try some pyretic saline—it always cures mine. But is it not a mercy about that umbrella? Jane Marsh took it home last night by mistake, and then, finding it was not hers, thought it might be the Lawsons, and sent it there — why, goodness only knows, since they were not at the Smarts' party."

Lydia felt quite conscience-stricken at her own comparative indifference to a piece of informa-

tion so momentous, and with a gallant effort to shake off this self-absorption and assume a little sympathy, even if she had it not, asked: "Who brought it?"

"Who brought it?" replied Madge, slowly, and with a divided mind, half of her attention being concentrated on her hair, which she was rearranging before the toilet-table. "Lydia, in what a much more becoming light you have managed to get your looking-glass than mine is. But about the umbrella. Oh, Eva Lawson sent it over by—Lydia, I think my hair high up like this suits me—by Mr.—Mr. Thingammy—you know. May I have some of these hairpins? Thank you. He is downstairs now. He asked for you, but I suppose if you have a headache you won't care to go down."

Lydia's attention had wandered during this speech; but at the end she roused herself once more to ask, without the faintest



curiosity: "Who is downstairs?"

"Why, Mr.— Oh, dear! I can't remember his stupid name. That tall man you are always — Mr. Calvert; that's it!"

"May I come in?" said Mr. Dacres's voice.

"Pray can neither of you come downstairs to entertain Mr. Calvert? At this moment, while I have left him to look for some etchings he wishes to see, he remains quite alone in the drawing-room, while he knows you are both in the house. You show a great want of consideration towards a well-informed man. If it had been, on the contrary, one of those empty-headed fops, the Smarts or the Marshs, you would have been down directly to receive them!"

"Well, I can't come down till I have done up my hair, and Lydia is ill."

"Ill?" cried Mr. Dacres, with his eyes on Lydia's rosy cheeks.

"No, no, I am not at all ill," she cried, hastily departing.

But she was quite pale by the time she reached the drawing-room, and her heart was beating as if it would choke her.

"It was very kind of you to walk over with the umbrella," she controlled her trembling lips to say, with quite conventional politeness.

"Yes, very kind — generous, even, seeing I had no other inducement or motive."

And in the light of his smile all her misgivings vanished, and within as without it was perfectly fine.





IV.

GRANNY LOVELOCK AT HOME.

THE afternoon sun shot one bright, broken spear of light! through the lattice window. It gleamed in crimson and green fire on the fuchsias; snow-white on Granny's cap and the pillows that supported her; dull gold on the russet coils of Ella's hair. Through the door set open to the summer air came scents of sweet, familiar flowers, but no clink of spade in the cottage gardens or jar of heavy wheels upon the road, and the tiny bassoon of one unresting bee

boomed loud above the Sabbath stillness.

"Naw, t'wanna rain to-day," observed Granny, "and Jarge will just about enjoy 'ees walk. 'A feels of it, bein' so tied along o' me; but there, 'tis no good talkin', for whativer can I do wi'out un, seein' I've no power in me fur to left myself, let alone git about; and as to goin' into the Union as zum folks zems to think, why that I wannat. There's Mussis Bird a zays to me t'other day: 'Why, Granny, you'd be wonderful comfortable there.' 'What,' I says, 'along o' all them squallin' babbies? T'ud drive me pretty nigh wild,' I zays. And I wants a lot o' tendin' to, I does, particlar' nights, when I doant close my eyes 'alf the time. Often I be fossed to waiken Jarge for un to come and zet beside me for a little comp'ny like. 'Why, mother,' a zaid, t'other night, 'I 'ad but just a dropped off when you called me, and I feels pretty

nigh wore out.' 'Dessay you be,' zays I, 'but 'taint no use to compline fur t'es the Lard's doin',' I zays, 'an a wull do what a 'as a mine to.'"

From where she sits propped up upon her little bed, so close to the window, Granny looks out upon such a view as on the far-off frontiers of the Empire they see in homesick dreams: the little cots whose eaves drop almost to the flowers that cluster round them; great bowers of verdure where the apples redden; fields that the river keeps for ever green, and, just beyond the line of poplars, a rim, a ripple, which only in the lowest lowland could be called a hill.

But of all this Granny takes little heed, if she even sees it. Her interests are purely human, and as neither man, woman, nor child is to be seen on the road which winds from Sedley Court to Vernon Manor, she turns to let her eyes rest on the slim figure of her visitor, now gazing

straight before her with rather a pensive look in her girlish eyes.

"Baɪnt very well, be 'ee, to-day, Miss Vernon?"


"Oh, yes, thank you, Granny, I am quite well."

"You looks rāther wite: you was tired, I reckon, bein' out so long yesterday. There was a great to-do at Sedley Court, wasn't there, Miss Vernon?"

"I did not go, Granny. Would you like me to read you a chapter in the Bible?"


"To be sure. There's the big Bible on the green wool mat on that there table, jest aneath the little picturs. 'Ee dedn't go? Now I thowt I zeed my lady and Miss Flora go by i' the carriage wi'out 'ee; and a wonderful lawt went by too; the De Veres, and the Haywards, and them new folks at the Priory. But 'ee dedn't go, Miss Vernon?"

"No, Granny. What chapte would you like me to read to you?"



“Any chapter, Miss Vernon, you cān’t go wrong; ’tes all good in the Bible. But I’m supsised you dedn’t go yesterday. Your two famlies, the Vernons and the Sedleys was allus terrible friendly, time out o’ mind—I’ve a-’eard my grandfather tell o’ it—terrible friends they was, but fell out, they did, most years over the shootin’. Once, I mind your grandfather, Sir Dacres, and the old Squire Sedley, they was zo put out, one wi’ t’other, that the Squire said ne’er a one of ’ees famly should set foot no more in the Court, and Sir Dacres said no more shouldn’t hissen at the Manor. And your Aunt Miss Georgina was in a sad way, and zo was Mester Edward, as we called ’un. We allus looked for it that Mester Edward should marry Miss Georgina, but they dedn’t, the old gents bein’ zo contrairy, but Mester Edward went off to furrin parts, a-fightin’, and Miss Georgina took up and married


wi' a gentleman in Yarkshire. Then come the news that Mester Edward was killed in battle, and th' old Squire was pretty nigh broken-hearted ; and Sir Dacres 'a rode strite over to the Manor, 'a ded, and shook 'ands wi' un, and they was as pleasant and kind together as iver you see, till come September, and then they fell out again. But Lord bless 'ee ! they had terrible queer tempers, both on 'un. Sir Dacres 'e must have 'ee's way in everything, right or wrong, and as to the old Squire, ef e'er a one did cross 'ee, e'd swear and holler to that degree you mäet a-heard 'un t'other side o' the county. But a kind-hearted gentleman as iver I see, and so they was all, fur I lived wi' 'un fust scullery-mäid and then stillroom-mäid siven years till I married. But zems to me the gentry is quieter nor they were, and more sense wi' 'un too. There's young Mester Henry Sedley come in 'ere t'other day and spoke as civil as



e'er a one. 'Granny,' a zays, 'do you know ef Miss Vernon is i' the village?' 'She 'ave but jist gone from 'ere,' I zays; 'she be gone up to old Job Monk's.' 'Thankee, Granny,' a zays, and, ev you believe me, a gev me half a sovereign; jist about a nice young gent I call un."

"Shall I read you the twenty-third Psalm, Granny?"

"Ef you please. 'T'es a beautiful Psälm and no mistake. Why, 'ere be all the chapel-folks come out a'ready; and Mrs. Sims as smart as iver was, wi' jit trimmin' on her mantle and a big red rose stuck a-top o' 'er hat, and the chil'ren wi' parasols, every one on 'un; and Lord-a-massy, there's that gal o' the Smiths just come 'ome from service, wi' sleeves blown out a-top jest like yourn, Miss Vernon. 'Pon my word! I doan't know what poor folks be a-comin' to. They're deal smarter work-a-days now than they was o'



Sundays when I was a gal. But law to be sure, ef 'ere bain't young Mester Sedley a-comin' down the roäd, and a smartish pace too. The young gent can step out when 'ees a mine to. I reckon 'ees goin' strite to the Manor, Miss Vernon. No a' bain't neither; 'ees a-comin' in 'ere, I do believe."

And indeed at that very instant the doorway was darkened by a big, broad-shouldered young man, who paused suddenly on the threshold as he met Ella's eye, just as if he had not expected to see her there.

"I am afraid I intrude——" he began, with very distant politeness.

"Lord bless 'ee, no. Come in, Mester Sedley. 'T'es only Miss Vernon a-readin o' the Bible. She be good enough to come and zet a-long o' me most Sunday äfternoons, while my zon takes 'ees walk. Come in, Mester Sedley, do 'ee; I be allus pleased to zee one o' your family—good

friends they was to me and mine in th' old time."

"There are some people, Granny," replied Mr. Henry Sedley, icily, as, accepting the invitation, he took off his hat, "who don't care for old friends."

"Aye, that's true, you may depind on't. I've a-lived in this row ten years come next Michaelmas, and, ef you'll believe me, not one o' the neighbours drops in for to zae me. Mrs. Tibbs, she come in yestirday, the fust time sence iver I was took bad. 'La'!' I zays, 'tes wonderful to zae you; I s'pose you ain't got no comp'ny at 'ome to-night.'"

"And there are some people, Granny," remarked Ella, in the same key as Henry Sedley, "who don't show very much consideration for their old friends' feelings when they do meet them."

"No more they doan't, Miss Vernon, that's sartain true. Some folks! ain't got no more feelin' in them than that there

kittle. There's Mrs. Bird, a zays to me as I 'ad a lawt to be thankful fur, cos I wasn't nigh zo bad as Job Monk, as cäent sleep night or day wi' the pine in 'ees legs, and doan't dare take no sleepin' stuff cos o' 'ees 'eart. Why, that's a pretty lawt to be thankful fur, that is! Who knows what I suffers a-lyin' 'ere and cäen't do zo much as a piece o' naidlework? But why doan't 'ee zet down, Mester 'Enery? Miss Vernon, my dear, ef you was to take your chair back a-bit, Mester 'Enery could zet down aside 'ee."

This is by no means in accord with Miss Vernon's own intention or desire, but there is nothing left to do—seeing it is the mistress of the house—but submit willingly, or unwillingly, to her decree.

It is very warm in the cottage, for a wood fire burns in the huge chimney-place, heating the kettle for afternoon tea. Granny has yawned more than once lately, and now, somewhat sleepily, con-

templates her young guests, sitting stiffly on their chairs and showing no disposition to entertain each other.

"'Tes like old times to zae you two, for you features your Uncle Edward wonderful, Mester 'Enery, and Miss Vernon is as like her Aunt Georgina as two paise—and her hair, too, jest the same, tuk up high i' the back and ringlets in front. Good to the poor they was, too, and zo was you all, Vernons and Sedleys. Many's a time I've a-zin Miss Georgina go by with her little baskit . . . jest like Miss Vernon there . . . and Mester Edward . . . I've a-zin 'ee . . . too . . . a fine . . . upstandin' sart"

Granny was asleep.

They heard her regular breathing and the loud tick of the pendulum that swung beneath the painted clock ; outside, not a sound ; even the bee had yielded to that all-pervading, all-persuasive silence and was taking his rest with the others.

"And now perhaps, Miss Vernon, I may——"

"Hush! don't speak so loud; you will waken Granny."

As it is impossible to be sardonic in a whisper he was compelled to change his tone.

"Well then, Ella, I think you owe me an explanation. Why, after promising to come to our tennis-meeting yesterday, did you never turn up after all?"

"I never promised I would go."

"You never—— Did you not say on Thursday afternoon, when I was mending your racket, that you would let me take you in to tea?"

"Well, of course, I meant I should do so if I went to your party."

"Oh, Ella, it is too bad! You know very well you made me believe you were coming."

"Well, so I should have gone if you had behaved nicely."

"Pray how did I not behave nicely?"

"Well, I hear that after

dinner on Thursday you went on in a most extraordinary way."

"Why! who has dared——"

"Now don't speak disrespectfully; it was papa."

"Oh, indeed! And, pray, what did papa say?"

"I cannot answer you if you speak in that horrible tone."

"I beg your pardon. What did Sir William Vernon accuse me of?"

"I don't know that I ever saw you so disagreeable as you are to-day."

"Well, I don't find you as pleasant as I could wish. But what did your father say?"

"Well, he said you talked in a wild, radical sort of way about everything, and that you wished to take all the land away from the landowners and give it to the poor."

"Oh! did he? Then all I can say is that he told—— I mean he gave an entirely wrong impression of what I did say. I only said that the transfer of

land should be made easy, so that those who wanted to sell and those who wanted to buy might do so."

"Ah! I don't pretend to understand politics, but I dare say it comes to much the same thing in the end. But it made papa very cross indeed; and I have asked you over and over again not to talk in that kind of way to him. You know it always makes him angry."

"But, my dearest Ella, if he asks me my opinion point-blank, how can I refuse to give it?"

"But if you wouldn't talk politics with him he wouldn't ask your opinion about them."

"He began it—not I."

"But you should change the subject. Mamma and I always do, directly he talks of politics or manorial rights. Did you not notice that very night at dessert, when he began talking about the disestablishment of the Church, mamma said what a beautiful altar-cloth Mrs. Lee was working?"

"Yes ; and what was the consequence ? After you left the room he said there was no having any rational conversation with women present, and at once started the subject of land tenure."

"And I dare say you were ready enough to contradict him. I never saw any one so fond of arguing in my life. You see, you argue even with me if I would argue with you ; but I won't, for I think it so silly, especially about things that are of no real consequence. And all I can say is that you made papa very angry, and he said, after you had gone, that he thought Cambridge had quite spoilt you, and that Mr. Charles Hayward was much superior to you, and he wrote to him next day and offered him a day's fishing."

"Indeed ! And may I ask what day Hayward came over ?"

"He came over yesterday, and——"

"Oh ! he did, did he ?" replied


Henry, suddenly changing from a very hurried, to a very slow and emphatic delivery. "Now I understand it all clearly. You might just as well have said frankly, instead of inventing so many excuses, that you did not condescend to come to our meeting yesterday because you were more agreeably employed at home—because you preferred Mr. Hayward's society to——"

"If you only came in here to insult me I think you had better go away."

"I don't see that you have any right to turn me out of another person's house; still, of course, if my presence is hateful to you I will remove it."

Long since, forgetful of their hostess's slumbers, they had raised their voices above the first well-chosen pitch, and the crash with which Henry now put back his chair was quite enough to rouse her.

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried Granny,



awaking. "Whativer shall I do? I be slept entirely a' one side, and I've a-got the cramp in that arm zo bad I doan't know how to bear myself."

"Let me lift you up again, Granny," cried Ella, rising.

"Lord bless you—you couldn't left me! There's not a-many can. I be a smartish wite, I can tell 'ee. There's Mussis Bunn ketched 'old on me t'other day and pretty nigh let me drap. Holler I did jest about."

"Let me lift you, Granny," said Henry. "I'll not let you drop. When my mother was ill I used often to lift her, and she said I did it as well as the nurse."

"Very gently then, ef you please, Mester 'Enery, for my poor dear arm is that tender; and Miss Vernon, my dear, zo soon as iver Mester 'Enery shefts me doo 'ee putt the pillows strite."

A more untimely interruption never was; for how was it pos-


sible, while thus engaged, to maintain that lofty dignity of bearing which both had at once assumed? To do them justice, they forgot their wrongs till their task was accomplished, and then—why then one at least of the offended twain was in a different mood. Actions are sometimes more eloquent than words, which is fortunate, since so many people, like Ella, are indifferent to oratory and impervious to reason; and as she watched the deft tenderness with which the strong young arms raised the old and helpless frame it was borne in upon her that there are qualities which, like charity, cover many sins—even the cherishing of heretical opinions, and the still more blameworthy habit of unseasonably proclaiming them. So when, Granny being settled as she would be, he looked up, prepared to meet a contemptuous glance with one equally scornful, he encountered instead a bright and indulgent smile, none the less delight-

ful because it was completely incomprehensible and bewildering to him, and his resentment and his jealousy were instantly forgotten.

"I was pretty nigh asleep when I come to slep zo. What was you a-zayin' to me, Mester 'Enery?"

"Oh! I was only telling Miss Vernon, as I do again, that I never said I wanted to take all the land from the rich and give to the poor."


"Lord a-massy! save my 'eart alive! Whativer makes folks zet sech tales about, and no reäson in it neither; for whativer should us do wi' ut? Why, there's some poor selly chaps 'ere as cäen't zo much as keep their 'lotments tidy. 'Tes like that man as come 'ere a-preachin' at the carner, just opposite the public, and zays we dedn't want squires no more. Ah! t'es all very well fur the like o' 'ee, I zays, as 'as so much as iver 'a wants to ate and drink, I zays,



and spreein' all over the country 'alf 'ees time; but what 'ud a come o' us poor sick folks ef there weren't no gentry? We shouldn't 'ave nothin' but the parish, and that wouldn't keep any one alive. Why, ef it 'twasn't for the beef and the milk I gits from my lady, and the wine and soup I gits from the passun's, and little bits of puddin' one and t'other gives me, why I should be entirely starved."

"And what I say, Granny," said Ella, "is that I dare say it was all a mistake, and I believe, if he tells me so, that he never said anything of the kind; but I do think that where people differ, especially young people and old people, it is much better not to talk politics at all."


"To be zure, Miss Vernon; that's what I zays a-many times to Jarge when 'a wants to arguefy wi' me. 'Ah!' I zays, 'you young folks, cos you've 'ad a bit o' schoolin' and can zet up a-reädin' the newspapers, you



thinks a wonderful deal o' your-selves; but I tell 'ee what it is,' I zays, 'you're a poor weak sart to what your grandfathers was. Why, they could do more work on bread and turnips than iver you can on bacon and eggs and butter.' And so they could, Miss Vernon," added Granny, yawning. "I cäen't think what's come to them. Cäen't do this, and cäen't do that, and mustn't work no more than 'ite 'ours. I ain't no patience wi' sech ways—I ain't—tell 'ee . . . "

Her head dropped forward a little. Granny was asleep once more.

And again they felt over all things that wonderful and unspeakable quiet, like the shadow of some beloved presence blessing and healing all the way-worn world. It soothed even the eager beating of their young hearts; they did not speak, but his arm stole gently round her, and she lifted her fresh young lips to his, and in one long kiss



was lost and forgotten the last feud of the Sedleys and Vernons.

"Bible reädin'? No, there warn't no Bible reädin', bless 'ee. Miss Vernon she talked strite on end till Mester 'Enery come in, and then they set to a-coortin'; but, Jarge, you jest bustle about a-bit, I wants my tea bad, I do."





V.

MISS AWDREY AT HOME.

BEFORE the old dower house to the garden side they walked up and down in the warm geranium-scented mid-day. He was in love with her, though he was only fifteen—deeply in love, or he would have been spending this bright September day very differently. He watched her furtively with such close and tender attention as he had accorded hitherto only to the rabbits he cherished and the caterpillars he collected. The sun shimmered upon her fair hair and bathed her young face,



smooth as a nectarine, delicate in hue as its blossom; only her soft grey eyes were shaded by the filmy handkerchief she had draped above her forehead, and in those eyes there was the far-off look he often saw there, and which perplexed and disturbed him. He wished she would say something, so long had she been silent, and his wish, when it was granted, made him open his eyes, for her utterly unaccountable and appropriate question was:

"What time does a shooting party usually break up?"

"A shooting party? Why, not at any time in particular; it depends on the season and the weather and——"

"I mean a shooting party at this time of the year, and on a day like this."

"Oh, I don't know exactly. They generally have had enough of it by five——"

"By five!" in a tone of inexplicable disappointment.

"Well, there's no set time, of course. It depends. Now old General Leigh, for instance" (she turned her limpid eyes full upon him), "would be ready to leave off to-day long before that, but his nephew" (she turned her face away), "that great, heavy chap—you know——"

"Do you mean Mr. Dalrymple?" she said, bending to smell a *gloire de Dijon* rose.

"Yes, Dalrymple; he's so keen, they say; he'll go on as late as ever he can."

"Oh! I think I must go in and practise now."

She went slowly up the stone steps between the iron railings buried in flaming sweet-peas and disappeared through the long door-window, while he watched her with mingled wonder and disappointment. She was the first woman he had ever studied, and he found her more puzzling than Euclid or Homer. She was always doing or saying something he did not expect, and for

no reason that he could see. She was in high spirits when there was nothing particular to enliven any one and silent and absent-minded when there was every excuse for being happy. She was wild about a thing one day and indifferent to it the next, and, as just now, she would rush at a subject eagerly as if intensely interested in it and then suddenly and wholly drop it as if she had never cared for it at all. But there—— the lawn must be marked afresh, and he strode off to find Andrews and the marking-machine, singing the latest comic song as he went in a style which made Miss Awdrey, even in the seclusion of her own room on the first floor, wince and shut her eyes with anguish as well as bitterly repent the rash impulse which had led her to wreck the peace of her well-conducted house by inviting two young people to stay there.

And indeed the jovial refrain of Harry's song did by no means

harmonize with the sweet and melancholy strains uprising from the drawing-room where Juliet, accompanying herself on the grand piano, sang and dreamt in that mellow twilight which was all of the glowing day the lowered venetians admitted.

"I like that song best of all you sing," some one had said to her a few evenings ago.

"Do you admire Sybille very much?" she had answered, with that assumed carelessness of manner by which instinctively she shielded herself from the perilous earnestness of his when they were alone together.

"Who is Sybille?"

"Why, the author of the song you have just been admiring."


"I know nothing about the author, and I don't care; I like the song because you sang it the first time I met you."

There was nothing very subtle or very beautifully turned in this compliment; Juliet, even in her brief time, had received many

a better ; but the effect of a speech does not always depend upon the words alone. In his voice, in his eyes, was that tenderness peculiar to masculine natures when they soften ; the mere recollection of it now made Juliet's breath come quicker ; and, pursued by a thought half-alluring, half terrifying, she left the piano and wandered restlessly about the long, low room with its treasures of china and chippendale set forth after the stiff fashion of a bygone day.

The bell rang, and she went up to bathe her flushed face and ruffle her hair becomingly before the glass ; and, as the gong sounded, went down the slippery stairs, past the hall door, wide open to the carriage drive, and entered the dining-room, where the whiteness and the glitter of the luncheon table were in brilliant relief against a background of dark draperies, oak panelling, and venerable paintings.

Harry was there already, crisp



and cool to behold in his pink and white tennis suit, but Miss Awdrey had not yet appeared, so they waited for her: Juliet at the window with her eyes seeking something beyond the "uttermost rim" of the horizon, Harry watching Juliet, and Simmins at the sideboard erect and impassive as usual. Then Miss Awdrey's quick, almost agitated, footfall was heard, and she entered like the spirit incarnate of the old world, rose-embalmed house. She was one of those lovely old ladies whom only our own maligned climate can produce; with a blush-rose complexion much flattered by the powdery whiteness of her abundant hair. Her attire, though Quaker-like in design and colour, was a masterpiece of careful study and execution in silver-grey satin and laces delicate as a spider web. With this a dignified bearing and manners, whose one fault was a certain air of preoccupation and

even anxiety not to be looked for in a mortal so favoured by fate. But Miss Awdrey's otherwise shadowless existence was darkened by one care—the care of her health. Not that there was anything the matter with it; but there would have been, so an instinct truer than all the doctors told her, but for her unrelaxing vigilance against fatigue, excitement, and indigestion. When a window had been shut to protect her throat and a blind lowered to save her eyes, they all sat down, and Harry lunched, Juliet pretended to do so, while Miss Awdrey dined on toast and a portion of mutton chop prepared in a singularly elaborate and unpalatable way composed by a fashionable physician. When she had finished, she spoke, drawing her lace draperies over her shoulder with a pretty fussy movement of her lovely hands.

“I hope, my dears, that it is clearly understood that only

Willie and Mary Grey are coming here this afternoon. Perkins gave me quite a shock this morning by talking of a party. I said, 'There is no party, Perkins. Mr. and Miss Grey are coming to play tennis with Miss Vere and Mr. Harry, and they will take tea quietly with them afterwards on the lawn as usual; but there is no party.' The state of my health would not allow of such a thing for a moment. As it is, I have been doing a great deal too much lately, and if I am not more careful I shall suffer for it. I don't know when I have seen so many people as during the last two weeks: it is too exciting for me altogether."

"I am afraid we are too tiring for you, Cousin Millicent," said Juliet, conscience-stricken.

"No, my dear, it is not exactly that; but since you came people have been rather inconsiderate about calling. I have been thinking it over, and, except when you

were out at some party, one visitor at least has called here every day ; and as to Mr. Dalrymple, he has been here five times in one week. That is absurd, you know."

"Very," cried Juliet, cordially, groping for something under her chair.

"Well, he won't turn up to-day, anyhow," cried Harry, with unfeigned satisfaction, "for he is shooting with his uncle nine miles away, near Enbury."

"Now I am going to lie down and keep very quiet for an hour, so Harry, my dear, if you wish to sing, you will oblige me very much by going to the kitchen-garden or the shrubberies where you cannot be heard from the house."

"All right, Aunt," said Harry, cheerfully, adding, however, when she had gone : "What rot it all is ! If she was to take a ten-mile walk every day and eat a raw beefsteak, she'd be right as a trivet."


"It's almost a pity we arranged

to have this game," said Juliet, languidly, with her forehead pressed close against the window-pane.

"Why, you said yourself the day before yesterday that you would like it awfully."

But Juliet, unwilling to explain that she then understood "the party" would probably include three, instead of two, guests, retired without further parley, leaving Harry once more in amazement at the inconstant character of her sex. He was very pleased with the party. Mary Grey played very well for a girl, and Willie, a first-rate fellow, never monopolized Juliet like that "conceited beast," Dalrymple, and others.

At three the Greys arrived, and Juliet reluctantly came down to meet them. She was in that mood when nothing but poetry is congenial, and the Greys were all prose: never wholly alive, it seemed to her, save on the tennis ground. They soon set to work



—work it truly was in Juliet's case—and the ball flew backwards and forwards, and the progress of the game was duly chanted by the boys' voices as the lime shadows crept slowly across the lawn, across the flower-beds, crimson and gold and mist-like blue, even to the feet of the players.

At a quarter to four Miss Awdrey came out and paced slowly to and fro upon the gravel. She was carefully protected against the inclemency of the season, but even her muffings were picturesque, and her large black hat might have graced a portrait by Gainsborough. The gravel path led straight as an arrow past the house and the lawn to the little wood beyond, and pausing on the brink of that Miss Awdrey looked into aisles of ivy-garlanded stems seen through a mystic darkness pierced by shafts of light which tempted her onward. So she went following the undulating

path till a sudden turn brought her into the carriage drive just opposite the lodge gate. Then only did she perceive how imprudent she had been, for she found herself face to face with a victoria full of gorgeously-attired ladies who at sight of her raised murmurs of respectful delight and admiration. No wonder! since now for three years had the Hutchinses, who rented the old priory which its owner was no longer rich enough to inhabit, been calling assiduously at the dower house without once being fortunate enough to set eyes on its mistress. And, indeed, with such ill-success might they have continued to pay like homage for ever, save for this happy or unhappy accident, as it took all Miss Awdrey's sense of honour and duty to induce her to receive the scions of those irreproachable families who had been the neighbours of her own for centuries. But even to interlopers with fortunes freshly made

behind a counter and glaring signs of their base origin visible in their looks and dress, it was impossible for Miss Awdrey to say with her own lips that she was not at home; so, with unconcealed melancholy which they mistook for great distinction of manner, she invited them to enter and conducted them back to the lawn.

Juliet at sound of the steps upon the gravel started and blushed rosy red; but when she turned her head and perceived the new-comers, the colour quickly faded.

"I say, let's go on playing hard," said Harry, with great presence of mind, "or perhaps they may want to join and spoil it all."

Miss Awdrey might have been glad of such a diversion. As it was she sat on a garden seat between her guests, and reflected that if little entertainment was offered they would all the more speedily depart. But the Hutchinses required no entertain-

ment; it was sufficient bliss—and very unlooked-for bliss, too—to find themselves seated in the innermost sanctum of the most exclusive of all the county ladies. Joy irradiated every feature as they contemplated the scene before them and commented on it in terms not unworthy of the Garden of Eden itself.

“I never saw anything to compare with it—never!” cried Mrs. Hutchins. “’Eavenly, *quite* ’eavenly, I call it. But I’m sure we never thought you ’ad a party, or——”

“It is not,” began Miss Awdrey, emphatically, but the words died on her lips as a long train of females marshalled by Simmins was seen advancing from the house.

“Why, here’s another lot!” cried Harry, causing Juliet once more to quiver with a thrill of unreasonable hope; but no, they were all women: Lady Dora and her daughters.

Meantime Lady Dora, as she sailed across the turf, was making her own reflections on the scene. If even the Hutchinses had been invited, it was worse than strange that an old friend like herself, whose hospitality had been so lavishly bestowed on Miss Awdrey's young relations, should have been forgotten; and she determined to let that lady know what she felt.

"Here we are, you see, dear, all uninvited; but I was quite sure, when I heard you had a party, that you would like us to look in. 'I know quite well,' I said, 'it is an oversight; one of the young people has forgotten to post a letter or give a message, for dear Miss Awdrey and I are such friends, and she is always so good in letting me see a great deal of her young cousins and nieces that I know she will feel hurt if we do not put in an appearance.'"

"You know," began Miss

Awdrey, solemnly, "that I never give parties——"

"No, you do not as a rule, I know, dear; but I think it so wise of you to break your rule, for I am sure it is good for one to keep up social habits, even though one feels disinclined. How do you do, Mrs. Hutchins?"

As she turned towards that lady Miss Awdrey seized the opportunity to hurry after Simmins and stop him just as he was re-entering the house.

"Simmins, remember after this I am at home to nobody."

"Very well, m'm. But I suppose I had better say 'At home' to Mrs. Freelands?"

"Mrs. Freelands!"

"Yes, m'm. She's at the door now, I think. She was coming up the drive be'ind Lady Dora, so I expect she see her ladyship come in, and will know as you are at home."

Miss Awdrey felt that her mind would give way. There

was no question about Mrs. Freeland's position, since she had married the head of one of the oldest county families, but of her origin—save that she came from the antipodes—nothing was known, though, so Lady Dora once meaningly remarked, much might be conjectured. She was a sparkling brunette, who moved like a fairy, dressed like a Parisian of the great world, and spoke with the twang of a cockney arab.

“Oh, this is jolly!” she cried, running up to Miss Awdrey and shaking her hands with great heartiness. “This is first-rate. Let me introduce Mr. Brown, Miss Sharp. I always wanted you to have a party here; I always said it was a shameful waste of such a place as this not to give one. And so you have plucked up courage at last and done it! Ain't you glad, now? Don't it look lovely?—only you haven't half enough people! You'll do better next

time. For now you've begun you'll go on, won't you—one every week, or every fortnight—eh? It will do you ever so much good. Nothing so perks me up when I am seedy as seeing a lot of people and having a regular jollification. Well, how are you all getting on there with your game? Hallo! I say, Mr. Grey, you've got a hole in your racket."

Miss Awdrey made no further attempt at justification or defence. She had sunk into a chair with a look of unutterable misery on her face and was now upon the brink of tears. She was far beyond making any attempt to play the part of hostess, nor was it needful, for this uninvited and undesired mob, which a cruel fate had let loose upon her, were now entertaining themselves all around her with an animated and unceasing chatter which made her head feel as if it would split.

Juliet, too, was now in a

melancholy and rational frame of mind. She had not looked round, she had not hoped for anything, at the third arrival. She had been pointing out to herself what a simpleton she was to keep expecting to see a person who was nine miles off, and who, despite all his protestations, apparently preferred the society of partridges to her own; then a mist came over her eyes, and Harry, whom even love could not blind at lawn-tennis, especially when the set was at stake, cried, "I say, Juliet, what a duffer stroke!"

Meanwhile a surprise was in store for her, and, indeed, for the whole party. At that instant Simmins, with his hand on the hall door, was saying "Not at home" to a big, broad-shouldered young man, with a sun-burnt face and dark brown eyes.

"Not at home?" repeated the visitor, staggered for an instant. "Not at home, Simmins?" he said again, with a very different

intonation, slipping a small yellow coin into Simmins's hand.

So it happened that, when the misery of the hostess and the merriment of her guests seemed at its height, Simmins's voice from behind announced resolutely, so as to be heard even on the tennis lawn, "Mr. Dalrymple."

Miss Awdrey gave a faint cry, as of one whose powers of endurance were at last exhausted, and Juliet lost the set for herself and Harry by a wild and preposterous stroke which sent the ball not merely out of court but far into the wood beyond. Then upon all present there fell in an instant complete silence—the silence of unutterable surprise, which kept even Mrs. Freeland dumb for some minutes, at the extraordinary and unprecedented spectacle, seeing it was the height of the shooting season, of Geoffrey Dalrymple at an afternoon party.

"I thought you were shooting

at Enbury?" Miss Awdrey was urged to murmur by a sense of intolerable wrong.

"Oh! so I was," said Dalrymple, lightly. "We've had a very good day."

He shook hands all round, entirely unconscious of the amazement he excited, as indeed of everything else save that Juliet was a few yards from him, and then strode off to where the players stood resting after their game.

"Miss Vere," he had the assurance—at least so Harry thought it—to say, picking up a racket, "let us play the others."

"We can't very well have three on one side," Harry observed, bitterly; but Miss Grey, to whom a delicious clatter of china had announced the approach of tea, hastily explained that she would prefer to rest.


And so they played on—a curious kind of game, in which Dalrymple took all Juliet's

serves as well as his own and Harry overreached himself, and his astonished partner too, by serves so viciously swift that they did not get over the net at all, while the tinkling of tongues and cups redoubled round the table, where Mrs. Freelands kindly dispensed the tea for Miss Awdrey after a simple method of her own, which consisted in giving essence of tea to the first five guests and hot water to all the rest.

Meantime the short day was waning. All the garden was steeped in the shadow of the woodlands, but their tree-tops glanced in crimson light, and from their leafy covert one marvellous bird voice pierced the still air with liquid music.

"Do you hear it?" asked Dalrymple of Juliet. "Let us go closer."

And, seizing this lovely pretext, they went—the game being over—and were lost to view in the amber mists and amethyst



shadows of glades which the evening transfigured with an aureole as glamour-like and as fleeting as young love itself.

"No, I don't think Miss Awdrey will give another party," said her ladyship, with almost sardonic emphasis, as they drove down the drive; "this one has been so peculiarly successful: I suppose the engagement will be officially announced directly."

"It has been the very jolliest 'at home' of the whole year," was Mrs. Freeland's parting speech.

Juliet and Dalrymple heartily agreed with her; so did not Harry; as to Miss Awdrey, she was in bed for a fortnight.





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